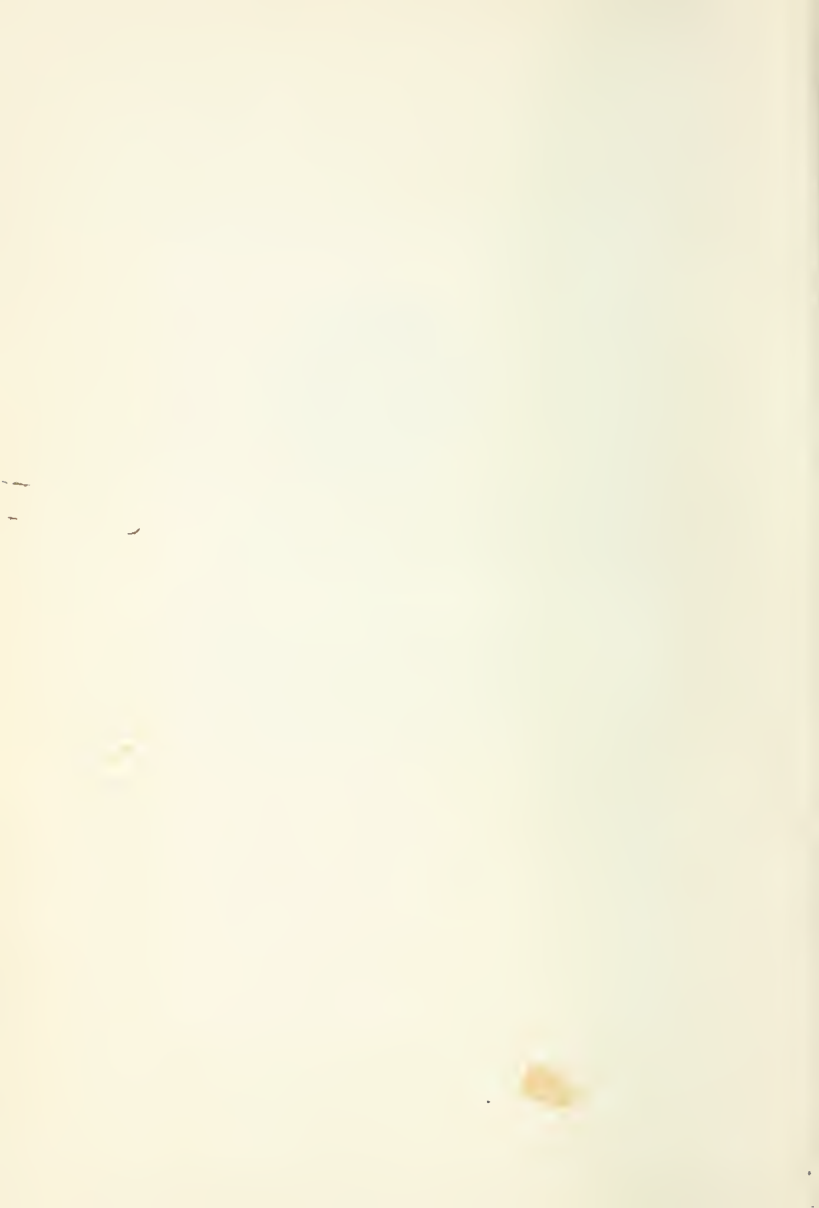






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The Hate of a Hun

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It was Gordon's turn to recoil from the levelled revolver

(Page 74)

The Hate of a Hun.

BY
ARTHUR WRIGHT.

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PROLOGUE.

The summer of '93 in the rugged hills of southern New South Wales.

As the long, hot day was drawing to a close, two horsemen rode through the thick timber on the hillside, each guiding a pack-horse upon which was strapped a bulky swag containing the goods and chattels of a bachelor bushman.

Though of different types, both men were stalwart, handsome youngsters; one a typical son of Australia, the other—if only from his big head, surmounted by its wealth of blonde hair and his light blue eyes—would have been easily classed by a keen observer as a product of the far-off Rhineland. These characteristics truthfully portrayed the man's origin, for Carl Presch was from the Fatherland. His companion and partner, Mervyn Goulder, was a son of the soil, his father a land-owner on the Western plains.

The two had come to these wilds to make their home and carve their way to fortune; and though the dense scrub through which they were passing seemed to indicate that they were pioneers of the district, such was not the case, for others had long years since blazed the track and lived their lives there.

On reaching the summit of the hill up which they had toiled, Goulder drew rein and, pointing downward, told his companion that their long journey was almost ended. Below in the hollow, where in the twilight the outlines of buildings were dimly visible, lay their final halting place.

"Not very inviting," growled Carl, speaking with hardly a trace of a German accent. "In this light the place looks ghostly and forbidding."

"And yet you will be charmed with it, Carl; I am sure of that," said Goulder, cheerfully. "Yedden has seen evil days no doubt, but you and I will lift the spell."

The young German laughed softly. "Let us hope that you prove a prophet," he said, as he urged his horse forward. "Come along, Merv, let's get it over, I'm starving." With a light laugh Goulder followed his mate, and they went downward to the old homestead.

Goulder had spoken truthfully when he said that evil days had fallen upon Yedden. Once a flourishing sheep station, it was now but a memory of days that were dead. Its homestead was a weather-worn ruin, its sheds but rotting skeletons, and its cultivation paddocks overgrown with scrub. The great grey kangaroos browsed undisturbed within the old stockyards, and no human had invaded its desolation for years, save perhaps a boundary rider in search of straggling sheep, or a pilgrim on the track, wandering aimlessly. Time's destroying hand had marred the handiwork of man, and a curse was

said to be on the place. The reason of that curse was the same reason that has fathered many a tragedy—the love of two men for one woman.

The young men spoke of this curse as they neared the ruin, for Goulder was familiar with the story. "There is not much chance of history repeating itself with us, Carl," he laughed.

"I think not," agreed Presch. "I fancy we will have to travel far in these wilds to find a woman at all, much less one that we both might fall in love with."

And as they chatted they crossed the broken slip-rails, and proceeded up to the deserted homestead.

* * * *

Merv. Goulder's father, knowing the district wherein the Yedden run was situated, and believing in its future, had proposed to his son that he and Carl Presch should buy the Yedden holding and restore it to its old time usefulness as a sheep station. The young German, who, though only a jackeroo at old Goulder's, was of a superior type and had wealth at his command, readily agreed. So the two young men became joint owners of the run, and worked enthusiastically. With the assistance of a couple of hired men, they cleared the land, reconstructed the ruined buildings, mended the tumble-down fences, and soon the place was good to look upon once more.

Before many weeks had passed the bleating of sheep was heard again in the long silent paddocks; and then a bountiful rain promised prosperity and happiness.

But a day came when into this Garden of Eden, peopled by two Adams, an Eve came; or to be more correct, the Adams rode forth and found an Eve in the person of Sheila Mayo.

Not many miles across the hills from Yedden was Martin Mayo's selection, and pretty Sheila, the pride of his heart, was adored by all the young bloods of the bush for miles around. It was but natural that once having made the acquaintance of Sheila, Merv. Goulder and his mate should swell the throng of her admirers. These two newcomers proved to be more in earnest than most; in fact the owners of Yedden, as if fate had decreed it, both fell madly in love, and their erstwhile affection for each other was swept away, to be replaced at least in the heart of one by the bitterest of hatred.

Of her many admirers Sheila could but give her heart to one, and the one she chose was Mervyn Goulder. The young man was in Heaven when he realised the joy that had come to him. But what of Carl Presch?

With black anger, and a desire for vengeance, the German sulked in the one-time happy bachelor quarters at Yedden, for he had heard from the girl's own lips that his mate was her accepted lover. Goulder came with outstretched hand, desiring his friend's congratulations, but Carl, with angry words and threats, spurned the offer of continued mate-ship. They would be mates no longer, for friendship was now impossible. He would leave Yedden, but some day revenge would be his.

So the soured lover rode back along the road he had traversed but one short year since, full of hope, with the friend he now regarded as his enemy.

In their happiness the lovers gave but an occasional thought to Carl. Goulder did not dally, but before many months had passed, he led a happy bride to her new home, declaring that while fortune smiled so brightly upon him, surely the curse of Yedden had been banished for ever.

* * * *

Three years have gone since Merv. Goulder brought his Sheila home. With the first had come a child—a tiny daughter—to bless and comfort. True joy indeed had been theirs, but now a change had come o'er the scene. Happiness was no longer with them, for the grim spectre of drought was blasting the once-smiling land. Their sheep had died in hundreds. Ruin stared them in the face, and in the midst of their misery, Carl Presch once more entered their lives. With words of sympathy and an appeal for a renewal of the broken friendship, he sought to comfort Goulder. His old mate bore no malice; he believed the man was true at heart, and having recovered from his fancied love for Sheila, wished to make amends for his hard words.

Together they sat over a bottle of whisky that Presch had brought with him; and, as the spirit cheered the worried squatter he talked merrily of the days the two had passed together; while Sheila in her room, alarmed at the return of this man whom in her heart she feared, timidly crooned a

lullaby to her baby. Soon Goulder's head sank on his arms on the table, and Carl contemplating him with a sneering smile rose and left him to seek another victim.

A scream rings through the house. The drugged man stirs, raises his head stupidly and listens. Where is Carl? What was that cry? By God, it's Sheila! In an agony of fear he rose, almost fell, for power seemed to have left his limbs; but with an effort he recovered, and dashed to that other room. The door was locked, but it flew open to his weight madly thrown against the panels. In the German's arms his wife was struggling weakly, her hands pressed against the would-be ravisher's livid face, striving to keep his grinning lips from hers. With a cry that was almost a scream, Goulder hurled himself upon his wife's assailant. A well-directed blow to the face caused him to release his victim and stagger back, but in a moment the two big men were in holts, struggling fiercely. They broke away panting heavily. A revolver flashed in the German's hand. Undeterred Goulder rushed in again, and now the struggle was for the weapon.

But suddenly the gun changed hands and Carl was recoiling from the menacing weapon in the raised hand of Merv. Goulder. Clasp ing her baby girl to her breast, Sheila had watched the awful struggle helplessly. Suddenly the German grasped her roughly and threw her in front of him. A flash, a report; the woman, still holding her child, fell without a cry at the feet of both, blood trickling from her white forehead.

The weapon fell from Goulder's hand; and the two men stood for a moment as if paralysed. Then Goulder sank down beside his Sheila. He called her name, he felt for the beat of her heart; all in vain. Sheila lay dead, her sleeping child clasped to her breast.

* * * *

Yedden in those days was far from the busy haunts of men. But one witness save Goulder himself knew how Sheila died, and that witness had vanished.

Goulder reported the death of his wife at Cooya, the nearest township, and no one suspected the violent nature of her passing.

From Carl Presch there later came a letter to Goulder.

"Do not fear me, you will not hang for murder. Not yet! not for many years, perhaps never again will you see me. I am recalled to Germany at once. I do not wish to come back, but who knows? Some day I might—in the service of my beloved country that I have ever worked for. Farewell,

CARL PRESCH."

* * * *

The drought lifted and Nature smiled again. Goulder's child grew to the beautiful likeness of her mother, and wealth was the portion of the unhappy master of Yedden.

CHAPTER I.

A BACHELORS' CLUB.

A NEW tenant had come to live in "Apsley." There was nothing strange in that, for since the owners of the pretty bungalow in Bradley's Head Road had gone to the Continent, leaving their home to be let furnished, quite a number of tenants had come and gone, no one remaining any great length of time.

The last spell of emptiness had by far exceeded previous records, so much so that the agents had reduced the rent. This move had the desired effect, for a fresh occupant was now installed. The new-comer was soon reported by the local gossips to be Fred Hayden, a well-known wool-buyer for foreign markets, whose business had suffered greatly through the war.

Hayden had seemingly converted "Apsley" into a sort of bachelors' residential club. No women-folk were noticed about the place, the servants being all of the male persuasion, and a good number of male guests and callers were entertained there.

The name of Hayden, of course, would not arouse any suspicion that its owner ams anything but a patriotic Britisher, and the type of resident at "Apsley" did not seem to set the neighbours thinking, especially

as men wearing the uniform of Australian soldiers frequented the place. Yet had the local Anti-German League but guessed the truth, what a sensation it would have been for them to work on in support of their demand for the internment of all enemy subjects.

But the truth was not guessed. Right in the midst of a fashionable residential quarter the enemy foregathered, quite unsuspected. Yes, "Apsley" was a select bachelors' home, but of select Germans.

Fred Hayden to his associates at "Apsley" was Fritz Heiden, that being his true name, unused for obvious reasons. With him at the bungalow were many wealthy enemy subjects at liberty by the grace of a lenient Government. Since public protest had caused the German clubs of the City to close their doors, members had perforce to seek a more secluded meeting-place, and "Apsley" was an ideal place wherein they could assemble and "Hoch der Kaiser" without fear, and exclaim "Gott strafe England and Australia" to their hearts' content.

They did this nightly, but they did not confine themselves to giving utterances to empty curses; they sought ways and means whereby they could, though so far removed from the scene of hostilities, strike a blow for the Fatherland.

To-night anyone lurking in the spacious grounds of "Apsley" might have peered through the window and beheld, assembled in the large living-room, more than a score of unmistakable aliens. The room was filled with smoke from cigars and pipes,

and waiters handed around large glasses of lager.

Presently the buzz of conversation was hushed. The host, well-known in Sydney society, and popularly supposed to be an American—from which country he had come—rose to address his confreres.

He spoke as if picking up the thread of a former discourse, which indeed he was, and his interested comrades were all cognisant of his subject.

“So,” he said, “my experiments are quite complete. I have tested thoroughly my solution. It cannot fail. See here is some of it in a solid form, harmless enough to look at, but its effects will be far-reaching and disastrous to the enemy. We will destroy whole wool and wheat shipments; in fact, the wool clip and the wheat crop of Australia are at our mercy. We start on the wool in the sheds outback, where it is pressed. We have many unsuspected friends amongst the workers, who will do our bidding. One small ball of this chemical preparation of mine, placed in a wool fleece damped with a certain acid, and pressed into a bale of wool, will sooner or later wreak enormous havoc. Its action is slow as is best, but it is sure. Pressed into the bale of wool, or placed amongst cargo in a ship’s hold, it will gradually assume a heat that must at length cause an explosion, followed by fire that nothing will check. Picture a troopship carrying a thousand or more soldiers from Australia, the hold full of wool, for an enemy country. One day a fire breaks out below. Ship, cargo, and men, are destroyed. Would not that be worth living to see?”

Applause checked Heiden's speech, for the picture of disaster he had conjured up was to the liking of his hearers.

"Or it may be in the stores of the City," he continued, "that this little friend will do its work, but it matters not. Whether on land or sea, the effect will be the same, but I would prefer to know of many ships bearing these mad, traitorous Australians, who go to kill our brothers with whom they have no quarrel, being sent to the bottom of the sea. My scheme has been endorsed by our executive, and we lose no time in getting to work. Emissaries will be sent out; it will be a great honour to be selected. One man is here with us to-night who with myself will start the new campaign, a man who like myself, has to the outside world borne a foreign name, but to his comrades is Count Carl Presch."

Heiden paused, and again applause broke forth as a man arose from the depths of an arm-chair and bowed to the company. He was a big heavy man of middle age, broad shouldered and tall. His hair was closely cropped, and his face cleanly shaved. In his hand he held a daily paper, and anger convulsed his heavy features, as tapping it with his fingers he spoke passionately.

"I thank comrade Heiden," he began. "It will be my delight to help in his most praiseworthy scheme to bring disaster to our enemies. I will go with him to the country, and at the soonest possible moment; but I wish to select the district in

which the work will commence. In this paper I have read something which makes me eager to act. This sort of thing generally amuses us, but in this instance to me it is different. Listen, comrades."

"In the Cooya district there are a great number of German settlers. Lately acts of disloyalty have been reported from this locality, where at the outbreak of the war residents expressed their adherence to the British flag. A meeting has been held by British residents at which it was resolved to petition for the internment of all enemy subjects. A strong branch of the Anti-German League has been formed, Mr. Mervyn Goulder, owner of Yedden Station, being elected president."

The speaker, with an expression of fierce annoyance, threw the paper from him, and a sympathetic murmur of anger and hatred issued from the lips of his compatriots.

"This is something of a personal matter," continued Presch. "I know Yedden, and this Mervyn Goulder who poses as its owner, who dares to form a league against my fellow-Germans in Australia. I will deal with him. At Yedden let us commence, comrade Heiden, for the wool is now being shorn. I will show this man what it is for a German to hate."

He sat down scowling, his face livid with emotion, while his friends applauded wildly. ..

"It shall be as our comrade wishes," cried Fritz Heiden. "To Yedden he shall go, to strike once more for Fatherland."

CHAPTER II.

A SOLDIER RETURNS.

IT was a busy time at Yedden, for they were in the midst of the shearing, and the usual quietude of the station had given place to bustle, and activity. On the broad verandah of the homestead a girl stood alone, gazing down upon a busy scene in the clearing below. There in the Spring sunshine, stalwart men were yarding sheep ready for the shearing, and counting and branding those already shorn. But the thoughts of Sheila Goulder were not with the shearing. Just at present she was all excitement and impatience, for she had a moment before received through the 'phone from Cooya Post Office, the words of a telegram. A message from her lover; her soldier-sweetheart, Jack Gordon.' He was back from the war, and would be at Yedden that very day. Sheila was beside herself with joy, and well she might be, for it is not the lot of every maiden to be beloved of a hero, who had fought and bled for his country like her Jack had.

So intent was she with her thoughts that a man's voice at her side, familiar though it was, caused her to start in alarm.

"What girlie; did I frighten you?"

Shelia laughed nervously. "How stupid of me," she cried. "But I did not notice you, Dad, though I was wanting you badly; I was thinking of going in search of you at the shed."

"I left them to it," said the man, throwing himself into a chair. "I'm a bit on the tired—or perhaps it's lazy—side to-day. I'll be glad when we're cut out, and all the wool is away."

"You'll take a holiday then, Dad, won't you?" pleaded the girl. "You have worked so hard here for years and years, why can't you go away for a while?"

"Yes," he sighed sadly. "A spell, girlie, wouldn't be bad; I'll think about it. The clip has been a record, the Yedden wool will bring along a handsome cheque. Fortune has been good to us, girlie. I hope you are happy." He rose and took her hand in his, and looked down from his commanding height, into her wondering eyes. A big man was Mervyn Goulder, of Yedden, bearded, bronzed, and stern looking. He rarely smiled, and there was often a strange look in his eyes that frightened Sheila, who, dark and brown-eyed, lithe and active, endowed with all the grace and beauty of Australia's loveliest daughters, seemed but a child beside him, as he stroked her black hair with his big rough hand.

"Of course, I'm happy, Dad," she assured him. "Happier than ever at this minute, and that is why I wanted you."

"What good fairy have you seen, my dear, to bring you this extra joy?" he asked.

"Oh, Dad, Jack is coming home again. He will arrive by to-day's coach."

"What; Gordon!" cried Goulder. "I'm glad, but it's sudden, is it not? Why did he not write?"

"I don't know," answered Sheila, "he'll have to explain that later. I want you to come with me to Cooya to meet the coach."

"Of course, I will, and all the boys as well, I'll bet," cried Goulder. "We must hurry, I'll get the car out. We'll drive down to the shed, tell them about Jack, then off to Cooya to welcome him."

"You're a dear," exclaimed Sheila, as her father, almost as excited as herself, ran out to get his car ready for the short trip to Cooya township.

Young Jack Gordon had been Goulder's right hand for some time prior to the war, and the squatter missed him badly, which accounted for his eagerness to meet him. Gordon was a native of the district, but though only twenty-five now, he had been a roamer. His late father had been wealthy, so Jack had more chances in life than the average bush lad. Finishing his education in England, he had induced his father to allow him to enter the Army and he obtained a commission in the Royal Artillery, but after a couple of years he bought himself out, and returning to Australia, was forced through the financial failure, and subsequent death, of his father, to work for a living. He wandered back to his home town, became a

shearer and general bush worker, popular and beloved by all he came in contact with. Goulder induced him to stop at Yedden, for the place had grown enormously, and he felt that a little new blood in the management would not hurt. So Jack became working manager of Yedden, and under his direction, it became more modern and up-to-date. The latest machinery was installed, an electric lighting plant erected, and a motor car, much to Sheila's delight, became a permanent institution.

Thrown into one another's company so much after Sheila's school days were finished, it was natural that the two learned to love each other, and with Merv. Goulder's approval they became engaged.

Everything looked rosy for the future, when war broke out. Jack declared that he must go to England, and rejoin his regiment, and Sheila, could not find it in her heart to put an obstacle in his way.

He went, was sent to the front quickly, and took part in all the stirring events of the beginning of the war. Returning to England wounded, he was granted extended leave, and to-day he would be back at Yedden, thousands of miles away from the horrors of war.

Sheila's joy was tempered by the knowledge that it was but a fleeting visit, still she was thankful, and hoped to make the most of it.

Hurrying to her room she quickly made ready for the journey to Cooya. On her table stood Jack's photo, and he looked a gallant lad indeed in his uniform. Raising the picture she pressed it to

her lips as she had done times out of number during the months that her lover was away from her, then pinning to her blouse a badge that he had sent her from Flanders, she ran out and joined her father in the car that he had in waiting.

"Hurry up," he cried. "We don't want to keep him waiting. I want to go along to the shed and let them know the news. I'll tell them that if they wish they can knock off and turn out to meet Jack."

"I'll bet they will, too," said Sheila. "They've missed him this shearing, the place hasn't seemed the same since he went away."

Goulder smiled, but he knew the girl spoke the truth. "He's not too late, if he wants to buck in and do a bit," he laughed, "but I don't expect the old work will appeal to him just now."

Arrived at the shed Goulder alighted, and as he entered the bell for "smoko" rang.

"Lads," he cried. "I've a bit of news for you. Jack Gordon's home from the front." He had to pause at that, for a diminutive rouseabout shrilly called for three cheers, which, being given with a will, made the shed resound.

"He'll be in Cooya by this afternoon's coach. What do you say? Is it down tools, and away to give the boy a hearty welcome home?"

The response was noisy, and unanimously in favor of the proposal, and a general stampede towards the huts ensued.

Over the hills towards Cooya sped Merv. Goulder and his smiling daughter. On the summit of the last hill Sheila looked back.

"Here they come," she shouted, clapping her hands in glee, "won't Jack be pleased to see them all again."

Far behind on the road in a cloud of dust, could be seen a crowd of galloping horses. "Yes, Gordon will be glad to see them," agreed Goulder, as he glanced back, "but I'm afraid he will want to know why a lot more of them have not gone to the front before this."

Cooya, sleepest of bush towns, was awake this afternoon. The arrival of the coach always drew a number of curious onlookers, but to-day the whole population seemed to be assembled in the main and only street. The news had spread that the first soldier to return to the district from the front was arriving, and everyone wished to see the hero. The arrival of the master of Yedden and his daughter broke the monotony of waiting, and the dash into town of the station-hands was another thrill, only eclipsed by the arrival of the coach itself, with its soldier passenger. There he was seated by the driver, a smile on his handsome face, as with his hand at the salute he looked down upon the cheering crowd.

Once on the ground in the midst of his friends, Jack wished himself back at the front again, while Sheila waiting impatiently in her car almost cried with mortification, as she stood and watched her hero—her very own—hugged and kissed by women, young and old alike, before she had a chance. At last he was rescued by the men of Yedden, and

carried shoulder high to the car, to be bundled hot and rumpled beside her. If the crowd yearned—as no doubt it did—to witness the warrior clasp his sweetheart in his manly breast, in an ecstasy of pent up joy, it was disappointed. In response to Goulder's touch the car moved forward, the crowd scattered, cheered again, and the show was over.

"Jack," gasped Sheila, and began to cry, burying her face in her handkerchief. The hardened warrior, too, felt a lump forming in his throat, but he swallowed it, and tried to laugh as his arm stole around her.

CHAPTER III.

AN ECHO OF THE PAST.

THE reception to Jack Gordon was over. The men had departed to their quarters after drinking the returned soldier's health at the homestead, and the evening meal being finished, the moment that Sheila and her lover had longed for at last arrived. The moment when, quite alone, they could give vent to all the words of love that had been kept back so long.

Out on the verandah, as the sun sank behind the hills, the old, old words were whispered once again. Vows were renewed, and sealed in the way that all lovers understand so well, and in the intervals Jack told of his adventures in stricken Belgium and Flanders, where in the first days of the war the German avalanche seemed destined to sweep all before it in its mad rush to Paris, until the gallant Allies checked and held the Huns at bay.

Inside in his own particular den, while the lovers billed and cooed, Mervyn Goulder sat smoking alone. He had felt somewhat happier to-day than had been the case for years. But now as the day was dying, a reaction had set in. A sense of some approaching trouble obsessed him. The letters

brought by the day's coach lay unopened before him. He had not troubled about them, instead he sat there allowing his thoughts to wander.

Twenty-three years had come and gone, since he first came to Yedden, and he had been away from it but seldom in that time. He had seen the place change as the years went by from the old-scrub grown run that he had first known, with its ruined buildings and rotten fences, to an expanse of beautiful, well-fenced, grass-grown paddocks, with thousands of sheep peacefully grazing. A modern homestead, woolshed, and men's huts, replete with every up-to-date improvement, now graced the landscape, and altogether the new Yedden was a place to be proud of. Still the master of it all sighed, for the tragedy of the past was always with him. He did not own Yedden. Somewhere there was a man who, did he wish, could claim at least a share. Often he thought of his old-time mate, Carl Presch, wondered where he was, and when he would hear of him again. He could hardly forget Carl, for every day he came in contact with men of the same nationality. Of late years the Yedden district had been largely settled upon by Germans. For miles around their flourishing farms dotted the hills and gullies, and with their ever-increasing families they seemed destined to dominate the district.

Somehow Goulder could not help connecting Carl Presch with the influx of Germans to Yedden. Carl knew the great fertility of the country and perhaps

had recommended this particular district to his Government, as a desirable spot for the sons of the Fatherland to settle on. No one had anticipated any danger from the invasion in times of peace. Surely none could be feared from such genial, inoffensive, hard-working settlers. Indeed, they were welcomed heartily as a desirable addition to the rural population. At the beginning of the war these German farmers had met together, and passed resolutions declaring their devotion to the Flag under which they lived and had their freedom, but when news began to filter through of the success of the army of their Fatherland, and the devastating march of their Hunnish brethren through Belgium and Northern France, a change came o'er the scene. They became arrogant and insulting. The German flag was brazenly flown; the patriotic songs of their country were sung, and openly they boasted of the prowess of the Kaiser, and his invincible army.

As the months went by, and young Australia flocked to the colors to fight for King and Country, the Germans laughed their guttural laugh, and worked gaily at their farms. They hoped for the final success of the German arms, they admitted. "But anyhow, what did it matter to them? If England vin; vell, ve are all ride, is id nod so? Ve still our proberty haf. If Yermany vin, yoost der same; ve haf our farms, all ride, and der farm of some Australian fool as vell."

The manner of these men aroused the indignation of the Britishers of the district. Why should they

tolerate the insolence of the brothers and offspring of the murderers and ravishers of Belgium's womanhood. To combat the growing danger and agitate for the internment of these enemy subjects, a branch of the Anti-German league had been formed, Goulder, who felt strongly on the subject, being elected as president. To-night the committee was to meet at Yedden homestead, and in his present mood, the squatter wished that the meeting could be avoided, but it was too late; he must get through it somehow.

Shaking off as best he could the depression that had possessed him, he commenced to open and read his correspondence in the fading light. Most of the letters were purely on business matters, but the writing on one envelope arrested his attention. As his eye rested on his own name written by a never-to-be-forgotten hand, his blood chilled. For a score of years he had not looked upon that handwriting, but he knew it. It was Carl Presch's!

From a cupboard near at hand he procured a bottle of brandy and a glass, and his hand trembled pitifully as he poured out a stiff nobbler. Steadied somewhat by the spirit, he tore open the envelope and drew forth the dreaded letter. He had not been mistaken; the missive was from the companion of his early manhood. It started abruptly, without any introductory phrases:—

So after twenty years I will return to Yedden. Have you forgotten your German friend, your mate and partner? Ah, no, you could not, for I am your

partner still. I have kept your secret all these years; even now I can bring you to book for your crime. Half at least of Yedden belongs to me, though I have not troubled, for I am rich, but I have not forgiven. You stole from me the woman I loved, you killed her and I did not bring you to justice, but now our countries are at war I serve as ever my beloved Fatherland. You would persecute my countrymen, so beware.

Expect me soon.

CARL PRESCH.

The lines deepened in Goulder's face as he read. Despair gripped his heart, and crushing the letter in his hand his head sank on to his arms on the table, and the twilight faded.

CHAPTER IV.

PRESCH COMES BACK.

IN the gloaming the lovers still lingered, the world forgetting. Quietude reigned, save that now and again the bleating of sheep or the sound of some noisy chorus sung at the men's quarters was borne to them on the evening breeze. These sounds they heeded not, as they sat hand in hand, concerned only with one another.

Their reverie was rudely interrupted by the sudden illumination of the verandah. Anne Carroll, the buxom housekeeper, who from long association with Yedden regarded herself as one of the family, had switched on the light, and was laughing heartily at the discomfiture of Jack and Sheila as they hurriedly drew away from each other. "Sorry," cried Anne, "but Mr. Gordon's wanted. Here he is, boys."

For the first time the lovers realised that others beside Mrs. Carroll were present. There on the lawn in front of the verandah stood three grinning station hands.

"What is it?" demanded Gordon, rather crossly, and his tone caused the men to laugh outright.

"We want Mr. Gordon, Miss Sheila," said one of the men. "Can you spare him for a while? The chaps want to hear something about the war."

"Yes, certainly," stammered Sheila. "I will—I mean he will go with you at once; won't you, Jack?"

"Suppose I'll have to," growled Gordon, rising. "Righto, lads, I'm coming."

When he had gone Sheila went inside, scolding Mrs. Carroll for what she termed the housekeeper's rudeness, but that worthy only chuckled more than ever. "Hold your tongue, dearie," she said. "What's there to be ashamed at in being caught with your sweetheart's arm around you. Isn't that its proper place. Besides, you would have had to leave him, for the anti-German meeting will start presently; I hear them coming now."

True enough, the members of the local committee had arrived, and Sheila had to receive and usher them in. There were half-a-dozen of them, mostly neighbouring cockies, sturdy bush workers, rough from their daily toil, but deadly in earnest, to judge from the seriousness of their demeanour.

Having seen the visitors comfortably seated in the large living room, Sheila went in search of her father. She had given no thought to him since Jack had returned, and now her conscience smote her for her neglect. It was strange that he was not in readiness to meet his visitors, but no doubt he was resting after the worries of the day and had forgotten his night's engagement.

His room was in darkness, and Sheila's call was unanswered. Entering softly she turned on the light. Her father was there, his head bowed down upon his outstretched arms, and the girl's heart sank as she saw the brandy bottle near at hand. She touched him

gently on the shoulder, and he started up, so white-faced and scared-looking that Sheila recoiled, alarmed at his unusual appearance.

"I—I—must have been dozing," he stammered. "Do you want me, dear?"

"The meeting, dad. Have you forgotten? Mr. Morton and the others are waiting."

"Yes, I had forgotten," he answered, strangely. "Tell them I will be along at once, though I wish I could get out of it. I'm afraid I'm not myself to-night, Sheila."

"I will tell them that you are not well. You must rest——"

"No, no," he interrupted. "Run along, dearie; I'll be after you at once."

With a look of concern at her father Sheila withdrew, and Goulder, pouring out a liberal nip of brandy, drank it neat. Lighting a match he burned the letter that had agitated him, and, rising, he walked steadily out to greet his fellow-members of the Anti-German League.

Chafing slightly at the delay in getting to business, the committeemen were relieved at the entrance of their president. Goulder, greeting them all cordially by name, opened the meeting without further delay. The minutes of the last meeting were read, and members spoke of instances of German arrogance and disloyalty that had come under their notice. Josh Kale told in heated language of a disturbance at the local school, where the German children hooted the Union Jack and jeered at the singing of the National

Anthem by their fellow pupils. Kale was demanding the internment of all Germans and the confiscation of their holdings when the sound of an approaching motor-car disturbed them. The vehicle was apparently coming up the gravel pathway leading to the homestead. In a moment the headlights of the car streamed into the room, and Sheila, entering hurriedly, threw open the French windows leading to the verandah. As she did so she started back with a little cry of surprise, for a stranger stood there, a big man in motoring garb. He bowed stiffly, and, handing her a card with a muttered apology, stepped uninvited into the room.

Risen to his feet, Mervyn Goulder stood white-faced and stiff, as if an apparition had appeared to him, while the worthy members of the committee looked on open-mouthed in wondering amazement. Sheila passed the card to her father, but it fluttered, unread, from his nerveless hand. He had no need to read it, for he knew his visitor too well.

The intruder made to stoop and recover the card, but Josh Vale reached for it, and its owner was forestalled. He snarled at Josh as that long Australian, instead of politely returning the pasteboard, stared rudely at the name inscribed thereon. As he did so Josh jumped as if stung. He handed the card to his nearest neighbour, and so it went from hand to hand, each worthy Leagueite squirming as he read the foreign name inscribed thereon—"Carl Presch."

All stared fixedly as the enemy intruder, but he, seemingly oblivious to their presence, had eyes only

for Sheila Goulder. The girl seemed to hold him as if hypnotised. The committee, rising in a body, broke the spell.

"I protest!" cried Andy Mackie. "This intrusion of an alien to our meeting is a scandal. Mr. Goulder, as President of the Anti-German league, I demand that this man be ordered from the house."

Presch heard, and his face convulsed with rage, while a snarl formed on his lips. He stepped threateningly towards the speaker and his friends, causing them to shrink back in alarm at his fierceness.

"Mr. Goulder will not order me from his house at your bidding, my friend," he snapped. "Rather will you go, and take your unmannerly friends with you, for I wish to converse with my friend."

No member of the committee spoke again. All were too shocked and surprised at the attitude of their President towards this German. Josh Kale, nearest the door, was again in possession of Carl's card. Rising, he held up the card with fine contempt, and tearing it to pieces, dashed it dramatically to the floor. Then he made for the door, trampling the offensive card under foot, each of his companions doing the same as they followed him out.

The German watched them go, his expression of rage gradually giving place to one of amused contempt. "The worms," he muttered, "the miserable reptiles. *They* demand the internment of all Germans! Pah!"

Goulder and his daughter had stood by silently during the scene, and now Presch turned to the squatter:

"And so we meet again, after all these years," he said. "You do not seem overjoyed."

"The surprise, and the circumstances of your coming," said Goulder, haltingly. "I was upset. Won't you sit down. This is my daughter."

Carl took the girl's unwilling hand and gazed into her eyes, but she snatched her hand away and averted her face. "I do not like you," she cried, moving towards the door. "Your coming has upset my father. Please, do not stop long."

"So you do not like me," smiled Carl, looking after Sheila; "yet I cannot hurry away, even at your bidding. Now, friend Goulder, your friends have deserted you, let us talk together."

CHAPTER V.

A BRUSH WITH THE ENEMY.

P UZZLED as to what this visit of Carl Presch might portend, Sheila sought the seclusion of her own room to try and think. To-day had been the happiest of her young life, but now it seemed that black trouble was about to overshadow the fleeting joy of the afternoon. Who was this man whose coming had affected her dear father so much? Rightly she guessed that he had some connection with that secret sorrow she knew intuitively had clouded her father's life. She could not ever remember hearing her father speak of Carl Presch, yet it seemed as if ages ago she had somewhere heard the name and dreaded it.

"Ah, well, Jack was not far away. That was one great comfort," she told herself, as with a deep drawn sigh she looked out of her window in the direction of the men's quarters.

From the sounds of merriment wafted towards her it seemed that they were enjoying themselves. She began to wonder what they were doing down there.

"Oh, why am I not a boy!" she impatiently demanded of herself, "then I would not be compelled to remain cooped up here like a prisoner." She fell to thinking of her father and that awful stranger in the other room,

but it was not many seconds before her thoughts had drifted back to Jack Gordon. Suddenly yielding to an impulse she threw a wrap over her head and stole from her room on to the verandah and out into the night, directing her steps across the home paddocks towards the shearers' hut. "I'll just run down and peep in and go for my life back again" was the plan she formulated as she hurried along.

The hut was crowded with smoking, talking men. There had been a noisy welcome to Jack Gordon, with vocal choruses in galore, but as Sheila crept up to the window and peered through there was silence.

As she looked her soldier lover mounted a stool, his appearance being hailed with great applause. When the noise had subsided he began to speak, at first quietly telling of the ordeal he had gone through during the rush of the Hunnish hordes through Belgium and of Britain's great need of men and munitions.

"Australia has done well," he declared. "She has earned a name that will never die. The graves of our fallen heroes dot the dreary slopes of far-off Gallipoli, where Australia's fame was won so dearly. I would have been proud indeed had I taken part in the glorious effort, but I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have been fighting our real foe, the damnable machine-made army of the mad dog of Europe."

At this stage there was some interruption, guttural grunts of protest coming from somewhere in the room, but Gordon ignored the sounds, and continued:

"We have done well, I say," he cried. "You, of Yedden and Cooya, have sent your bright sons, thou-

sands of miles across the seas to fight for justice and liberty; but can we not do better still? There are men in this room to-night who I believe can and ought to go. I am going back again; who will go with me; who will help me fill the many gaps in the ranks of our Australian army?"

Half-a-dozen young fellows sprang up amidst applause.

"This is our last shed," cried one, speaking for all. "When Yedden's cut out we're with you for the front."

"Good lads!" shouted Jack. "I will have to go back to France, but I would dearly love to lead a march from here to Sydney of a thousand bushmen ready to fight for King and country."

"You talk rot, Gordon," bellowed Darby Dillon, the presser, a big bush-worker, well-known as an active member of the I.W.W. "You've become a regular Jingo. Why should we fight for England, the home of the Jew capitalist. We'd all be as well off if the German eagle floated over Australia as we are under the Union Jack."

Jack and many others cried shame on the speaker, but many applauded, and Dillon continued shouting above the din, "We workers have no quarrel with Germans. What does it matter to us who wins. The men who enlist in Australia are a lot of mugs. I'd put every man in khaki in the lunatic asylum. No country on God's earth is worth sacrificing a life for."

A German shed hand here leapt up and mounted a box. "Goot boy, Darby," he cried. "Der Kaiser vill haf all dis Australia soon, you bed your live. Hoch

der Kaiser." He produced a miniature German flag, bearing the double eagle, and amidst the applause of many of his countrymen, who had found their way into the building, waved it defiantly.

Jack Gordon could stand it no longer. He sprang from his stool into the crowd, and, forgetful of his recent wounds, threw himself upon the big German, and tearing the flag from him, sent him reeling with a well-delivered straight left. Instantly the room was in a turmoil. Men were in holts, wrestling and punching, and blood flowed freely as the battle raged. Someone smashed the lamp, plunging the hut in darkness, but still the fight went on.

The watcher at the window, her heart beating madly, left her post and rushed away. Up to the house she flew, gaining her room unobserved. She was breathless and terror-stricken, but she did not lose her head. Her intention was to summon the police to quell the riot. Not allowing herself to pause for fear of collapsing, she staggered to the passage, where, near a door leading to the living room, a telephone connected with Cooya was situated. From the room the sound of voices highly pitched could be heard, but she heeded them not at the present.

To ring Cooya was the work of a second. "Send assistance at once," she cried. "There is a riot at the woolshed. I will meet the troopers on the road and drive them in." Her intention was to dash out along the road in her father's car to meet the troopers and to bring them quickly to the scene of the disturbance; but the sound of those voices, louder than ever, caused her

to pause and listen. The German, Carl Presch, was speaking.

"My return here meant no good for you, Goulder, you may be sure. I came to take possession of Yedden, of which I own one half. I meant to have you arrested for that crime of twenty years ago and a trusted German placed here in charge. Then all the Yedden sheep and wool would be mine, for the use of my country. That was my plan; but it is in your power to alter it."

"In what way?"

"Your daughter, beautiful Sheila, has been the cause of my wish to temporise," continued Presch. "She reminds me of that other Sheila, her mother, the woman that I loved, and whom you stole from me. Give her to me, then my lips will be sealed; refuse, and I brand you as the wife murderer that you are."

Sheila's heart almost stopped beating. She grasped the door-knob, intending to rush in and give the lie to that persecutor of her father; but her father was speaking now, and she paused again to hear his reply.

"Give my girl to you; a Hun of the race of the ravishers of the women of Belgium? By God, no. Do your worst, I defy you. I would rather face a hangman's rope than give my daughter into the grip of a German."

Relieved, Sheila opened the door, and stepped into the room. The men stood facing each other, her father white but defiant, Presch livid with rage. Before the girl could speak another interruption broke the spell.

A man's head appeared at the verandah door. It was one of the hands from the hut. "Quick," he cried. "Come down for God's sake, boss, there's a rough-up down at the hut between the Germans and the rest, they'll be burnin' the woolshed down."

Goulder dashed out after the man, and Presch followed. Sheila, strengthened by the excitement, hurried to keep her compact with the troopers.

* * * *

Jack Gordon's welcome home by the Yedden shearers had developed into an unseemly free fight. From the darkened building the combatants had fought their way out into the open, and made things more than willing in the moonlight.

No doubt the knowledge that a meeting of the Anti-German League was to be held at the homestead that night had brought along such an unusual number of Germans to the men's quarters, on the lookout for trouble. Whatever the reason they were there, and if they came for fight they were getting their fill of it. The Britishers gradually got the upper hand. Stunned and bruised men lay around like soldiers on a battlefield, until at last the combatants dwindled down to the big Hun—Hans Hoffman—who had waved the Double Eagle of Germany, and Jack Gordon.

"They started it, let them finish it," said someone, and nothing loth both sides drew off to witness the combat between the Australian and the German. Both were fatigued from their great exertions. Gordon more so than the other, for being but lately

discharged from hospital he was in no form for fighting. Otherwise the two were equally matched; for what Jack lacked in weight he made up in skill and agility and a knowledge of fisticuffs, about which his heavy and clumsy opponent knew but little.

The bout was short and sharp. Hans, depending upon his weight and strength, rushed like an infuriated animal at Gordon, hitting out wildly, but Jack easily avoided the blind rush by a quick sidestep, and Hans, unable to check himself, dashed headlong to earth. Rising dazed, he paused, and that pause was fatal. Like a flash Jack was upon him, planting right and left in quick succession on to the big fellow's unprotected face. Hans dropped his hands, sagged at the knees, and sank down with a moan; rolled over and lay with his face to the ground.

It was at that moment that Goulder and Carl Presch arrived; and the former sharply inquired as to the cause of the trouble.

"A little brush with the enemy, sir," said Gordon, as he put on his coat, "but it's finished; I've knocked out the beginner of the fight as you can see."

Presch glared at the crowd, snapped out a few words of German, and instantly a score of hands came to the salute. Pointing to Jack Gordon, one young German said, "He insult der Kaiser, then he strike Hans Hoffman, den we fight mid dem, for a long time. The fault it was mid him."

"You see, Goulder," said Presch, "this is a result

of your anti-German foolishness, stirring up strife between peaceful neighbours who desire no quarrel; what are you going to do about it?"

As he spoke, into the crowd dashed a motor from which leaped two troopers, followed by Sheila who ran to Jack's side and clung to his arm.

"What's wrong here?" demanded the senior trooper.

It was Lieutenant Gordon who answered.

"These men here, these Germans, who enjoy the liberty of British rule, flaunted their flag and upheld the Kaiser. I, as an Australian soldier, could not stand that. Hence the trouble."

"He caused the riot," declared Darby Dillon. "Only for him there would have been no fight."

"You infernal waster, Dillon!" cried Gordon. "It was you I should have thrashed, instead of that poor wretch there. He at least stands up for his own flag. You bear a British name, yet you uphold the enemy of your country."

"Do your duty, and arrest this man, officer," said Presch, pointing to Jack. "He has provoked a breach of the peace." The two constables conferred together for a few minutes while the shearers crowded around Jack and Sheila.

"Mr. Gordon," said of the troopers at last, "you had better come with us."

"What!" cried Gordon, "arrest a Britisher for resenting an insult to his flag. Surely you do not mean it?"

"Sorry," said the officer, "but we won't call it

arrest till we see the Inspector. Our instructions are to see that no offence is given to German citizens."

"Don't go, Jack," cried his friends, crowding in upon the police, threateningly.

The constable touched Jack on the arm. "Make it as easy for us as you can, Mr. Gordon," he pleaded. "We can't help it."

"Don't worry about me, lads," cried Jack. "I'll go with Trooper Walsh and his mate. I suppose they are doing their duty, but there's something wrong somewhere when an Australian can be arrested at the bidding of a German."

CHAPTER VI.

HER FATHER'S BURDEN.

THE twenty years of Sheila Goulder's life that had passed had not been particularly happy.

Though of the world's goods she had always had enough and to spare, there had been in her life something wanting, something that made her think that she was different from other girls. She had never known the joy of a mother's love; that was a gap in her life that could never be filled. Her childhood had been passed with an indulgent, but often morose and silent father, with no playmates of her own age. When the time arrived for her to be sent away to school, she felt that she was being transported to another world. At school in the City her outlook on life broadened greatly, and when she returned to Yedden and Jack Gordon entered her life, she began to realise that after all this world was a good place to be alive in. But her joy was short-lived. She seemed destined to a life of disappointment. The war cloud in Europe burst with a fury that disturbed the whole world, and Australia hastened to the aid of the Motherland.

Jack Gordon elected to leave his sweetheart, and rush to the fray, and she, though facing her new

trouble bravely, was sore of heart and nerve wracked during the months of that awful carnage. And now that he had returned, she had expected at least a few brief weeks of happiness; but even that was to be denied her.

Simultaneously with Jack's coming, the man her father dreaded, so, Carl Presch, had appeared and impudently demanded her hand. She dared not tell Jack of the overtures being made by the German, but she resolved that she would never fall into his loathsome clutches alive.

The disturbance at Yedden had been a nine-days wonder. Things soon regained their normal state. Jack Gordon was made the scapegoat for the trouble by the local administrators of justice, though a lecture from the bench was his only punishment.

He was enjoined to be more careful in future, as it was the wish of the authorities that all should be guarded in their actions and utterances, so that offence should not be given to the peaceful Germans in the community.

Highly indignant, Gordon made up his mind to at once return to Sydney, to place the whole matter of the attitude of the Germans at Yedden and the surrounding district before the Government. Peaceful Germans, indeed! He had experienced their ideas of peace, and his blood boiled at the mistakenly lenient attitude adopted towards an enemy that would devour the hand that nurtured him.

Jack had been gone more than a week now, and Sheila found little to comfort her. Her father

appeared to be in constant dread of some impending disaster, though since the night of his arrival Presch had not visited them. He had made the Cooya Hotel his headquarters, and was spending his time motoring around to the houses of the many German farmers of the district. Sheila saw him often speeding along the roads, for she was an ardent motorist herself and frequently indulged in a spin with Mrs. Carroll, the nearest approach to a mother that she had ever known. That Carl was an agent of the enemy she had no doubt, and she kept Jack posted by frequent letters of his movements as far as she was able. If Gordon could only rouse the authorities and bring about the internment of Presch, what a relief it would be to her father and herself. Beyond a respectful doffing of his cap Carl did not attempt to accost her, so she began to hope that, after all, he was not going to cause the trouble that she knew her father dreaded.

She was soon to know that Carl's intentions towards them were not what she was hoping for. Returning rather late one afternoon from her drive, she met her father at the evening meal, which of late had become a cheerless mockery as far as Goulder was concerned, for his food was scarcely touched. To-night he asked Sheila to join him in his room after she had dined, and the girl with sinking heart, made her way there, expecting to hear bad news.

Becoming more worried and aged-looking every day of late, her father's haggard depression to-night

made her shudder. Without a word he handed her a letter, and she read:

Any day now I come to take up my abode with you for a short while. You cannot dispute my right, for am I not still part owner? Our deed of partnership is not void. I wish to be near my Sheila, for she must learn to love her future husband.

CARL PRESCH.

As she read, she threw off the sense of dread that had oppressed her. Her blood boiled with indignation as she cast the piece of paper from her as if it contained some deadly poison.

"Father," she cried, "will you submit to this? What right has this man to say that he will be my husband? I would kill myself rather than that should happen."

"I would rather see you dead," murmured her father sadly, "and myself as well; but you have a right to know the truth. It has been locked in my heart for more than twenty years, dear, but I will tell you now."

Sheila sank down on a rug at her father's feet. He took a photo of her mother from the table, and placed it in her hand, while he conjured up a vision of the past.

CHAPTER VII.

HOFFMAN IS CHOSEN.

JUST a few miles across the hills from Yedden lay the selection of Hans Hoffman, the German with whom Jack Gordon had fought—forty acres, bearing the best of all the good things that the fertile region was becoming famous for.

Many sons of the Fatherland had settled around Cooya and Yedden during the years that had passed since Merv. Goulder and Carl Presch had blazed the track. All had prospered in the glorious land so many thousands of miles from the country of their birth. They had enjoyed the freedom of the British flag, and if any should have loved the land of their adoption, it was these voluntary exiles from the thralldom of the Kaiser. But though many of them had become naturalized and had sworn allegiance to the Flag under which they flourished, now that trouble had come they flouted their oath. With them Germany always ranked first no matter what oaths they may take.

One such was big Hans. He it was who waved the alien flag at the welcome to Jack Gordon, and had been made to bite the dust by the gallant

Australian, who in the years before the war had been his friend.

To-day Hans is busy amongst his fruit-trees, near the main road to Cooya. He has not quite recovered from his combat of a week ago, his face still displaying evidence of the power of an Australian's fist. For 'all that, Hans is whistling merrily at his work. He had been reading the papers to suit his own hopes, and his heart rejoiced at what he regarded as the certain victory of the German arms over the combined enemy.

"Ah, if we could only give Australia a dose of the Belgium medicine," he thought, "what a great thing it would be. We would teach the swine to go away to shoot the brave Germans. Ach! who is come?"

The latter query was in consequence of the stoppage of a motor car at his gate, and the approach of its only occupant towards him.

Hans waited the coming of the stranger with a curiosity that was not unmixed with dread; for the farmer did not rightly know what was to be the outcome of that little affair of the hut. A salutation in guttural German set his mind at rest, and a glance at the card handed him brought his hand to the salute in true military style.

"Fritz Heiden." A name known to all true Germans throughout Australia as a secret agent of the Government of their country.

Hans, wondering what might be the business of this distinguished visitor, led the way in to his

pretty home. 'There in the neat and cosy parlor their glasses filled with good Australian wine brought by Hans' Australian wife, these two aliens cried "Hoch der Kaiser," and drank continued success to Germany and the downfall of her enemies.

"Are we quite alone, comrade Hans?" enquired Heiden, when the enemies of the Fatherland had been sufficiently damned.

"My vive only is in der howse," answered Hoffman, "And her I vill send oud of der way." Hans went out, returning quickly. "It is quite all ride," he said. "No one is here, we are all alone mit ourselves only."

Fritz Heiden, whose English bore but little trace of the German accent, and whose appearance was British rather than foreign, smiled slightly at his companion's mode of expression, and continued the conversation in the language of his native country.

"We in Australia are far removed from our Fatherland in the time of trouble," he said. "It is hard that we cannot go to do our part towards the great victory we are winning."

Hans nodded stolidly and puffed his pipe in silence, content to listen without comment to the other's message.

"It is the desire of the Emperor," went on Fritz, "that, though so far away, we should strike here a blow for Fatherland. This Australia is helping with men and money the enemies who surround and threaten our country."

"Gott strafe Australia!" grunted Hoffman.

"Yes, Australia must be punished," agreed Fritz, "and it is to do something towards it that I am here. The work in this district has been entrusted to myself and Count Carl Presch."

"What will be the means?" queried Hans. "Is it to be an armed rising, all of us here are armed and well supplied with ammunition."

"That is not yet," said Heiden. "Other and quieter means will be tried first. You, Hans Hoffman, have the happiness to be one selected to help us here at Yedden. Your loyal devotion is well known to us and will not go unrewarded. You were a chemist, a scientist like myself, comrade, if report speaks truly?"

"Yes, that is right," nodded the other.

"Then you will be interested in my scheme. Shipments of wool destined for detestable England are to be destroyed. To bring that about it is proposed to deal with the wool in the sheds before it is pressed. Into fleeces damped with acid, a material of certain chemical properties will be introduced; the fleeces are pressed into the bales, then eventually they will be shipped away, perhaps on ships bearing troops journeying to shoot down our brethren. The dampness and heat of the tightly-pressed wool will gradually cause the chemical to explode and burst into flames. It will be slow to acts, Hans, but cannot fail. Whole cargoes will be destroyed, together with the ships; or perhaps it will happen that woolsheds and City stores are burned. It matters not, the damage will be done,

and our enemy punished. Can I count on you?"

"Ach!" cried Hans, resuming his broken English. "I vill of course help. Let us begin soon; now, at once. Have you this chemical prepared already?"

"I have a good supply," replied Heiden, opening his bag. "See, here is the composition. These harmless looking balls and the acid in this jar will do all that I have stated. I have tried it well, it cannot fail."

"But how vill we the fleeces ged?"

"You work at the woolshed, I understand, comrade."

"No," growled Hans, "nod this time. Every year oop till now. Mervyn Goulder will nod employ a Yerman now."

"All the worse for him when the reckoning comes," laughed Heiden. "At any rate, you should be able to gain access to the woolshed. The work must be done at night, the fleeces in the bins ready for the morning must be operated on."

"Yes, I can get in all ride," agreed Hoffman. "I vill ged der keys. Darby Dillon is the presser, his mother is of our country, and Darby vill help. Gif him money, he vill to Cooya go, on der spree, I vill dake hees yob on der press for they vill be stuck, then all vill go ride for us."

"Good," said Heiden, replacing the things in his bag and closing it. "We rely on you. It would be well to begin to-night. The Count and I will wait for you at midnight near the shed. Should you succeed in gaining the keys, be there ready for the night's work."

CHAPTER VIII.

HELD BY HUNS.

S MARTING under the indignity of having been made to appear at the police court for resenting an insult to his country, Jack Gordon determined to go at once to Sydney to tell his story at headquarters. Surely when he told of the many dangerous aliens and enemy sympathisers in the Yedden district, some drastic action would be taken. It was maddening to know that these upholders of Kaiserdom were at liberty to insult the British Flag with impunity, while a man who had fought for that Flag was ordered to refrain from saying anything that would give offence to Germans. It was on a par with the order that had been issued in a Government department at the beginning of the war, bidding officers not to discuss the war in the hearing of employees of German birth. Surely there must be something wrong with the Government of a State that could show so great an anxiety to protect the feelings of such an unscrupulous enemy.

Gordon felt so strongly on the matter that he gave up his holiday, tore himself away from the sunshine of his sweetheart's smiles, and took train

to the City, but as subsequent events proved, he had undertaken a task that was harder to accomplish than he had ever anticipated.

On the platform of the Central Railway Station, almost as soon as he had stepped from the train, he was accosted by a well set-up, young fellow, wearing the uniform of a Lieutenant of the A.I.F.

"Lieutenant Gordon, I believe," said the stranger, pleasantly.

Jack, being trained to caution, looked the man over carefully before replying. "Yes, that is my name," he said, "but I do not remember you."

"We have not met," said the other. "My name is Precious, 7th of the 20th, you know; I had a wire to meet you."

"Meet *me*? Whoever from?"

"Mervyn Goulder, of Yedden. See, here it is."

Jack took the proffered slip of paper, and read it wonderingly.

Meet Lieut. Gordon, Southern Mail. See that he is looked after.

MERVYN GOULDER.

"You know Mr. Goulder?"

"Oh, very well indeed," answered the officer. "No doubt he knows that I have many influential friends, and may do you some good. Believe me, old man, I will if I can."

"Strange," mused Jack. "I do not remember ever hearing your name mentioned at Yedden; I cannot quite understand——"

"An afterthought, I suppose," laughed Precious,

carelessly; "but do not let it worry you now. I have a car waiting. It belongs to a fellow-officer of mine, you know. You can drive in it to the Club, where I will join you later, and have a long chat."

Jack followed his new acquaintance doubtingly. He could not understand the meaning of his being there to meet him. However, the open manner of the man and his uniform disarmed suspicion, and Gordon decided to go with him. Precious led the way to a closed-in motor car that was waiting. Rain was falling and the driver was muffled up in a way that concealed his face, Jack wondering why the fellow wore such disfiguring goggles in the City. The car was of an uninviting appearance, looking more like a funeral carriage than anything else, but in response to his companion's cheery advice to jump in out of the wet, he entered the vehicle and sat down.

Remarking that he regretted having an appointment that would delay him, Precious closed the door on Gordon, and the car moved quickly off. As it sped along towards the heart of the City, Jack began to realise that the atmosphere was rather stifling. He endeavoured to open a window, but they seemed fixtures, as they would not move. He gazed around searching for some ventilation, but the contrivance seemed absolutely air-tight, and there seemed no means of communicating with the driver. He fell to wondering for what purpose such a queer car was built; presently he began to feel sleepy, and he tried to rouse himself. A strange

gassy smell was in his nostrils, it was growing stronger, it was suffocating him. He must break a window, he must obtain air somehow, but all his strength had left him. A sense of weariness took possession of him and he sank back into a corner. It was growing dark; perhaps if he slept a little——”

* * * *

“Vell, you vos one heavy sleeper all ride.”

Jack looked around at the sound of the strange voice in stupid wonderment. He was lying fully dressed on a stretcher in a clean, well-furnished room. It was night time, and an electric light bulb glowed brightly. In the centre of the apartment sat a bald-headed, bespectacled stranger, who grinned at him not unpleasantly as he puffed at a large meerschaum pipe.

“You vakes oop at last, vat?”

“Who the blazes are you?” demanded Jack, as he realised that this watcher of his slumbers was of enemy origin. “Am I back in France among the Huns, or am I dreaming?”

“You vos not in France, and you vos not dream. You joost vaig oop from von long sleep, that vos all. You vos nod intend to vake oop at all, but the Doctor, he say: ‘I vant him to vaig, so I experimend mid him, so that is vy you vaig oop.’”

“You make yourself clear, I don’t think,” said Jack sitting up, but his head ached so in an upright position that he was glad to fall back on the pillow again.

“Don’t get excited,” grinned the German, produc-

ing an automatic pistol, "you quiet must be, vat?"

"What does it all mean, you grinning square-head?" exclaimed Gordon. "Put that gun away. Can't you tell me why I am here, or how I come to be here." The man poured a drink of wine from a bottle on a small table near his hand, and offered it to his prisoner. "Taig this, and haf a drink," he said, and as Jack did so, he continued, "Yes, I vill tell you somedings. It matters nod vot I tells you, for you vill nod get away from here some more."

"Cheerful news. How long have I been here anyhow?" asked Jack.

"Yesterday, you come; it is now, to-night. You sleep all the time. That vos a goot long sleep, vat?"

"Too long," said Jack, gloomily. "I remember that queer car, the smell of gas, the darkness. Did I come here in that car?"

"Yes, I vos that driver. I figs you oop all ride. I turn on the gas."

"I was asphyxiated then?"

"You vos spifflicated or somedings. Presch, he prepare the car mid der poison gas cylinder under my seat, mid a pipe leading to der inside. Ven he close you in, and tell you that he not come, he oop beside me and gets and tell me vot to do. I gif you der dose gently as we drive along. It work all ride, and ven ve get you oud, they think you dead already. 'That yob vos easy,' said Herr Presch. 'Id vill some trouble save.' But the Doctor examine you. 'He vos not dead,' he said. 'I vill recover him, for I vill experimend mid him. I vill a germ introduce, then he vill forged; he will all memory lose.'"

"German kultur, I suppose," said Jack, "but Presch; who is he?"

"He vos von Captain, von brave Australian hero, that the war is going to," grinned the German. "He meet you at the Railway."

"Lieutenant Precious," cried Gordon, springing to his feet. "A German in our ranks. Good God, this is too much."

"Sit down or I shoot you siggs times," growled his keeper. "Presch vos nod the only German in der Australian Army."

Jack sank down once more reluctantly. "Why was I brought here?" he demanded.

"You vos dangerous, my frient. Presch, he receive word from oop der country, you vos come down about the Yermans oop dere. You must silenced be. Presch, he has the yob to haf you killed."

"Kill me! You can't mean that, man!"

"Yes. That is all ride. Ve fight for Yermany and der Kaiser in Ausdralia yoost der same. Our leaders we must obey. Presch, he vill spifflicate you some more here in dis room, then you vake oop vill not."

Despite the apparent seriousness of the situation, Jack felt inclined to laugh at his talkative companion, but he realised that the fellow was speaking truly. He was in the hands of the enemy, and the outlook was decidedly unpleasant.

"I wish somebody would come oop," growled Von Willmer, "I am gedding tired of this yob." He poured out some more wine and drank deeply,

offering more to his prisoner, but Jack shook his head, and the other drank his portion also.

"Who was it that sent word about me from the country?" asked Jack, presently.

"One of our chiefs, Cound Carl Presch, der uncle of your frient. He wired instructions. Ve meet you at der train his commands to obey. A letter also comes this day from Yedden. Der Cound, he go to live mid his frient, Herr Goulder, and he vill haf der daughter for his vive."

The words no sooner left the fellow's lips than Jack was upon his feet. With all his strength he threw himself upon the quite unprepared German, sending a smashing blow to his recently grinning lips. Following up, he grasped the wrist of the hand that held the pistol with his right, and upper-cutting with his left to the jaw, completely put the bewildered Von Willmer out of action. He sank to the floor unconscious and Jack, wrenching the weapon from his unresisting hand, seized his cap which lay handy and sprang to the door, burst it open and dashed down a flight of stairs determined to make good his escape, or sell his life dearly.

CHAPTER IX.

A MIDNIGHT TRAGEDY.

TRUE to his promise, Carl Presch came to Yedden homestead to take up his abode. One evening Sheila and her father were talking together after the small household had finished their evening meal, when the dreaded visitor came in unannounced.

In his hand he carried a suit case, and he bowed smilingly to Sheila, informing her that he had left his car in the garage, and had come to stop as he had promised.

Sheila, outwardly calm though her heart was beating wildly, regarded him contemptuously, while her father rising to his feet vehemently bade Carl be gone. Goulder's agitation ruffled Presch not at all.

"My friend of the long ago," he said, "do not be so unkind. Surely you can find it in your heart to welcome me to the old home, which has grown so beautiful under your care. Do I not own it with you? Assuredly I do, and I have taken steps to safeguard my interest. But enough of this unpleasantness; I wish for a quiet night's repose. To-morrow we may quarrel if you wish it."

With a sigh of resignation Goulder sank back into his chair, and rang the bell for the house-keeper. "We must submit, I suppose," he said weakly. "Sheila, go with Mrs. Carroll and show Herr Presch his room."

Carl bowed. "You are most kind and sensible, my old friend," he murmured. "I am sure that if *you* do not, Sheila here will appreciate my company. It must indeed be lonely for her without her gallant soldier-lover, who has gone to have all us poor helpless Germans put in prison."

Sheila faced him boldly. "How do you know Lieutenant Gordon's business," she demanded.

"I know a lot more than you imagine, my dear," he laughed. "Gordon's mission will surely fail, and I would be surprised to see him back here ever again."

Though Carl's words filled her with dread, Sheila betrayed no emotion. She did not pursue the subject, and Anne entering, she bade Presch follow them to his room.

With a mocking "Good-night," to Merv. Goulder, he stepped briskly after Sheila, Mrs. Carroll following with his suit case.

Most of the Yedden bedrooms opened on to the spacious verandah, and it was into one of these that the uninvited guest was shown. Sheila opened the door and haughtily motioned Presch to enter, while Mrs. Carroll, with all the contempt she was capable of expressing, spoke a piece of her mind.

"Things in this country have come to a pretty

pass," she declared, "when Germans are allowed to come and live in the same house as decent Australians."

Ignoring the indignant housekeeper, Carl thanked Sheila for her attention. He seized her unwilling hand, and bending down sought to touch it with his lips. Sheila wrenched it angrily away, and turned to go, but the man angered also by her action, threw his arms around her, seeking to hold her.

Thoroughly alarmed now, Sheila, exerting all her strength, broke away from the hateful embrace. Throwing out her hand, she struck Carl smartly across the face; then took to her heels and ran.

Showing his teeth in a snarl, the Count made as if to follow, but Anne Carroll, standing in the doorway, blocked him. Holding his suit case threateningly aloft, she cried, "You dog! stop where you are, or I'll arouse the hands down below. If they knew that you had insulted Miss Sheila they'd tear you to pieces."

"I meant no insult," snapped Carl. "Rather at first was I courteous, which is the custom of my cultured country."

"That for your infernal country," cried Anne. Snapping her fingers, she cast the case violently into the room, and hurried off muttering curses on Carl.

* * * *

It was after midnight. All was dark and quiet in the house. The worried master of Yedden had

retired to his room soon after the coming of his unwelcome visitor, and courted forgetfulness with the aid of brandy. Sheila had sheltered in the apartment of Mrs. Carroll, her foster mother, who bolted and barricaded the door, swearing that no Hun should cross the threshold alive.

The cause of all the consternation had not gone to sleep. He had spent an hour or so in writing, and when he grew weary of that, he stretched himself on the bed to think, while he smoked in the dark. As the midnight hour approached, he rose, donned an overcoat and cap that he had placed in readiness, and stole stealthily out on to the verandah. The night was undisturbed by any sound save the occasional bleating of sheep in the home paddock. Every room in the homestead was in darkness. All things seemed wrapped in slumber, so Carl, with little fear of being observed, stole away down towards the shearing shed.

As he drew near the building, two others joined him, and together they approached the door of the shed.

"It is all ride," whispered Hans Hoffman. "I haf der keys. No one see you com oud, I hope."

"Not a soul," returned Carl. "We need have no fear, open the door and let us get to work."

They were quickly inside. Carl, flashing an electric torch, looked around, and the disturbed sheep, ready penned for the morrow's shearing, made frantic efforts to escape. Many rolled fleeces were in the different bins, and an empty bale was

fixed in the wool press in readiness for the morning. Fritz produced his jar of acid and other material, and the work of unrolling, damping, and inserting the balls in the fleeces commenced. On the alert to catch any sound that might betoken danger, they worked on in silence.

"Ve vos foolish," grunted Hans, after a while.

"How so?" snapped Fritz.

"Der presser could do der yob better, vile he work," ventured Hoffman. "He could introduce von doctored fleece into each bale. That vos all dot vos required, aind't it? This vay we get all the doctored fleeces, perhaps in von bale, und der other bales haf none."

"But the presser is not one of us," said Presch. "How can it be done?"

"I der presser will be to-morrow," declared Hans. "Darby, I haf fixed oop to go on der spree."

"Good," whispered Carl, "that will be a great help, but we will do a few more while we are here."

* * * *

Waking with a start from a terrifying dream, Merv. Goulder sprang up trembling. He listened intently, but all was silent as the grave. He had dreamt that Sheila was in the clutches of Presch, and the quietness of the house reassured him. He switched on the light, drank a nip of brandy, then paced the floor restlessly. Suddenly his mind was made up. There was only one way out. He would kill his enemy, and then himself, for he could endure his torture of mind no longer. Taking his re-

volver from a drawer he crept from his room, and in a moment he was at the door of the room assigned to Carl. Noiselessly he turned the door-knob and entered. There was enough light for him to see that the room was empty, Carl was not there.

Puzzled, he gazed out from the window into the night. Was that a light that flashed down at the woolshed? Could it be that the German had gone there intent on some evil deed? He would go down and see.

Out of the house and across the paddocks to the shed, now bathed in moonlight, he crept, clasping his revolver tightly. The unlocked padlock revealed the fact that some one was inside. With scarce a sound he entered, and started in amazement at what he saw.

Crouched near the wool bins were three men, who appeared to be examining fleeces by the light of an electric torch. Wondering what their object could be he crept towards them, still grasping his revolver. Closer he drew without disturbing them, but his foot caught against something no doubt left on the board by a shearer, and he was discovered.

Instantly the three intruders turned in alarm to find Goulder's weapon covering them menacingly.

"Hands up!" he said sternly. Two pairs of hands obeyed the order, but Presch arose with a shrug of his shoulders, and regarded the newcomer calmly. "Put that damned thing away, Merv," he growled, "there is no need for it."

"What are you doing here, you and your German friends?" demanded Goulder.

"That is easily explained," answered Carl. "My friend here, Herr Heiden, is a scientist. He has made an important discovery concerning the treatment of newly shorn fleeces. He wished to conduct a little experiment, but being at present of the enemy, he feared that you would not allow him access to your wool, so being your partner, I took it on myself to assist him in his harmless experiment."

Doubting, Goulder lowered his weapon. Instantly Carl was upon him, pinning his hands to his sides. "Take the gun," he snapped, and Hans Hoffman did so quickly.

Fully alive now to the situation, Goulder sought to engage his adversary in a struggle for mastery. They were both big, powerful men, but the German was the heavier and stronger, for the squatter had weakened greatly of late. Madly he struggled, and freed his arms, but Carl held him close in a bear-like hug, and though he rained blows on his opponent's face and body at close quarters, they had but little effect, save to madden the German.

Exerting all his power, Presch brought the other down heavily, and the combat continued on the boards. Locked in each other's arms, they rolled over and over on the greasy floor, Hoffman circling around, watching for a favorable opening to end the combat with a bullet in the Australian's heart. Now Carl's huge hand sought the other's throat, to

clasp it as if in a vice. Goulder's eyes started from their sockets, his face grew livid, and his tongue protruded, but Carl did not ease the pressure. The choking man's struggles grew weaker, his limbs stiffened. He lay still.

Awe-struck Presch relaxed his grip, recoiling to his knees with a gasp of horror. "Dead!" he exclaimed. "I've killed him!"

"He vos loog for id," grunted Hans. "Id cannot be helped; ve moost get rid of him now; see he has your vatch chain broke."

True enough, in the struggle Goulder had seized his opponent's gold chain, to which was attached a medal, and it now dangled from his hand, tightly clenched in death. In vain Presch strived to release it, and his companions grew impatient.

"There is no time to waste," cried Heiden. "We must hide all traces of to-night's work; we must act quickly."

"How will we hide this?" asked Carl, indicating the body of his old-time friend.

"I will show you," cried Heiden. "Hans, see a bale is in the press ready to receive the fleeces. To work and put some there, it's work you understand. Now, Count, help me lift your friend, we will hide him effectually, I think. Are you ready, Hans? Now up with him, Count. Lord, he's no light weight."

Together they placed the dead master of Yedden in the wool bale, but before doing so Hans had to procure a rope and truss the body into as small a form as possible, then the doctored fleeces were

placed around it by the expert Hoffman, the bale filled, and the press set going, worked by Hans, who had pressed many a hundred bales there, but never one like this. At last the bale was finished, sewn, and released, an empty one being fixed in position ready for the morrow.

"It is vell that I come the press to work to-morrow," commented Hans, "else Darby vould vonder vot fairy work for him mit der nide dime, vot?"

"Come away Count," said Heiden, grasping Carl's arm. "They'll never look for him there, and later when those fleeces fire, perhaps well out at sea, his body will be burned and find a resting place that none will ever dream of."

CHAPTER X.

CONDEMNED TO DIE.

CARL PRESCH marry Sheila Goulder!

No thought so repulsive had ever entered Jack Gordon's brain. The very mention of such a nauseating possibility by Von Willmer, galvanised him into a frenzy of activity. Forgetting his sick feeling and splitting headache, he struck the fellow down, to make that mad dash for liberty, obsessed with the one idea—to get back at once to Yedden to protect the girl he loved.

While she was in danger, nothing else mattered.

Leaving his erstwhile gaoler unconscious on the floor, he dashed down the stairs, hoping to find an outlet somewhere, and so make good his escape. At the foot of the stairway he found himself in the darkness of what appeared to be a short hall, but he could not find the street door. He felt along the walls cautiously, his hand presently striking against a knob. Looking down he saw a chink of light showing through a key hole, and hesitated, not knowing what fresh enemy might be on the other side of the door.

Evidently the slight touch that he had given the handle had been heard, for a voice cried sharply, "Come in."

Grasping the pistol he had taken from Von Willmer tightly, he responded to the invitation, and entered.

The room, a large and elegantly furnished one, was brightly illuminated, and seated at a table, with cigars and whisky to hand, were two men. Both were in khaki, and judging by the uniform, were officers. One Jack recognised as he who had met him at the train, the other a stranger with iron grey hair and close-cropped beard.

They rose as Gordon entered, and he who had called himself Lieutenant Precious, but whom Von Willmer had designated as Presch, spoke.

"What, Gordon!" he exclaimed. "Was it you that made all that noise coming down stairs? How do you feel after your long sleep? Hungry?"

"You infernal German traitor," gasped Jack, exasperated at the other's seeming calmness. "Let me get away from this place. If you value your life, do not trifle with me."

"Put that thing away," laughed Precious, indicating the weapon that Jack threatened him with, and drawing his own revolver. "That's an old discarded thing of mine; if you look you will see that it is unloaded and useless, but mine is all right, I can assure you."

Jack looked, and saw that the other spoke truly. In disgust he threw the automatic from him. "Damn you," he exclaimed. "Will you explain yourself. Why was I brought here, and treated in this manner."

Precious shrugged his shoulders and turned to his companion, at the same time tapping his forehead. "I'm afraid you're right, Will," he said. "The poor chap's a bit gone; better lie down and rest, old man. The doctor here will look after you."

"Doctor?"

"Yes, Captain Shelley, of the Army Medical, you know," answered Precious, pouring himself out a drink of whisky. "He has had you under observation since you came here yesterday. You took bad in the car, you know, and fainted."

"I did not faint, you two-faced scoundrel," cried Jack, indignantly. "I was suffocated by some damnable gas that you let in upon me. You need not smile; I have all my senses, and I know you Presch, and the Military Commandant shall also know of you very soon."

The two men started as Jack spoke. Precious took another nip of whisky, and now his smile changed to a snarl. "You are mad," he declared. "My name is Lieutenant Precious."

"You lie! Your voluble friend, that you appointed my keeper, has let his tongue run riot. He has put me wise to your infernal villainy. I know you for the shameful thing you are. A German spy masquerading as an Australian soldier."

Precious raised his revolver with a savage oath, but put it down again with a sneering laugh. "So he talked, did he?" he laughed.

"Yes, and I outed the old wretch, and left him."

"Good enough for the drunken fool. You may

have bested Von Willmer, but you had no hope of escaping, as you must pass through this room. I suppose he talked because he knew that it did not matter. You are condemned to death, old man."

"By whom?"

"By my uncle, Carl Presch, an officer of the Imperial German Army, now in Australia in the interest of his Government."

"Carl Presch!" cried Gordon. "That is how I come to be here?"

"Exactly. Now that we have got so far, there is no harm in saying a little more. Have a drink?"

Jack shook his head. "I'll have nothing from your dirty hands," he said.

"Well, I'll have another," laughed Precious, tossing off a whisky. "The Cap. here is also unsociable, he's on the water waggon."

"You have had enough," said the Doctor, speaking for the first time. "You're nearly drunk now. Don't forget you have to be back in camp to-night."

"Don't worry about me," snapped Precious. "I know what I'm doing." He addressed Jack again: "Knowing that you will never carry your knowledge beyond this house, Gordon, I'll relieve your curiosity. I am Rudolph Presch, nephew and adopted son of Carl Presch, brought up in America as Charlie Precious, and now a good Australian soldier. My friend here is Wilhelm Schell, Australian born, but a true son of the Fatherland. We have enlisted and gained commissions in your great Australian Army, to fight not for the crime-stained Union Jack

of Britain—that hurts,” he laughed, as Gordon’s face convulsed with helpless anger—“but for the glorious country of our forefathers. Would you not do the same if our positions were reversed? Could you stand by and hear the homeland of your father and mother villified and cursed, your brave brothers, fighting the good fight, accused of nameless horrors; lies manufactured by lying enemies? I am sure you could not. I could not, anyhow; I may be called a spy, but I’m proud of it.”

“And so am I,” broke in Schell. “Australia will live to rue the day that she sent her sons to fight against Germany, with whom she had no quarrel. You talk of interning all Germans, confiscating their property, depriving them of the franchise and all rights of citizenship, but you talk too soon. The war is not over yet, and when it is, God help the Australians who are left when we come into our own.”

“Australia will never regret her part in the great war,” said Jack. “We are on the side of right and justice, and it will be to our everlasting glory that we helped rid the world of the threatened domination of the Hun.”

“Bah!” snapped Precious. “Say no more, Gordon, or your life will be shortened considerably, though you have not much longer to go. The Doctor and I sail in a couple of days. You know too much to be left capable of doing ourselves and my uncle harm.”

“Your uncle, Carl Presch, is at Yedden,” said

Jack. "The man you call Von Willmer also spoke of him. He said that he wished to marry."

Precious laughed. "Yes, the gay old dog," he said. "He has his eyes on a pretty kid up there, I gather from his letter. But he need not marry. He may amuse himself, and when he tires, perhaps his——"

The young blackguard did not finish. Gordon's fist checked his speech. Right across the table Jack had lunged, and the blow caused the speaker to stagger back, but he recovered quickly, and it was Gordon's turn to recoil from the levelled revolver. He gave himself up for lost, as he gazed at that enraged, bleeding face glaring at him, but Schell seizing the hand that held the weapon forced Precious into a chair.

"Don't spoil my patient, Charlie," he said.

Precious placed the gun on the table, so that he might wipe his bleeding mouth, and a string of oaths issued from his bruised lips.

"No, Doctor," he snarled. "I'll finish this myself. I'll kill the rotter right off. Damn your germs, they're too slow for my liking." He turned again to Jack, "How would you like to be left to the tender mercies of Doctor Schell," he sneered. "He proposes to operate on you, introduce some germ into your brain that will cause you to lose your memory and imagine you are a German. He's a grim humorist, ain't he?"

"I'd rather die," declared Jack.

"And so you shall," agreed Precious. "Stand him

up against the door there, Doctor, I want a little practice."

Schell protested no further. He led Jack to the door and bade him stand steady. "Charlie will have his way," he said. "Perhaps it's better so."

Precious drank still another portion of whisky, then facing Jack he raised his revolver.

But he did not fire; instead, with an impatient oath, he lowered it again and stood for a moment in an attitude of listening. A motor car had stopped in the road near by, and approaching footsteps were plainly audible in the room.

"Albrecth and the others, I suppose," said the Doctor.

"Yes," agreed Precious, with an air of annoyance, "I wish they had delayed their arrival a little. Move away from the door, Gordon, and stand still again; you'll find no friend among them. We'll have a larger audience, that's all."

As Precious finished speaking, the door opened to admit four men, and when Jack saw the type of men they were, his heart sank, for notwithstanding what Precious had said, he had hopes that the newcomers might intervene on his behalf.

Each one of the four was unmistakably a German, and they regarded the scene in stolid surprise. "My fellow officer, Lieutenant Gordon, whom you saw last night upstairs," explained Precious. "He has come to life again you see, comrades, but being condemned to die as an enemy of our country, I am about to carry out the sentence. Gordon, dur-

ing the little time left you, you will be pleased I am sure, to have the company of my friends, Herr Albert Albrechth, Rudolph Rahmann, Otto Bier-schenk, and Rupert Schnarndorf, all excellent and wealthy citizens of Sydney, men whom you and those that think with you would deprive of their citizenship."

"You were going to shoot him?" queried Albrechth.

"Certainly; has he not been condemned by our chief, Count Presch, and the sentence confirmed by you as chairman of the executive?"

"Not to be shot," interjected Rahmann.

"No," said Albrechth. "Bloodshed we cannot have here, nor the noise of shooting; put your gun away, comrade."

"Damn you," snarled Precious. "Who are you to give orders to me? This man cannot be allowed to live. He has gained too much knowledge. That fool, Oscar Von Willmer, has told him all. He knows my real name and that of Captain Shelley. Would you give him his liberty?"

"No," said Albrechth. "We have already decided that Doctor Schell would carry out the sentence of the court. He will deprive him of his memory for all time, then he cannot harm us, and his death will not be on our hands. Is it your wish so, comrades?"

Finding his friends all against him, Precious threw his revolver on the table with a curse. "Have your own way," he growled, "but if the operation fails, what then?"

"That's all right, Charlie," smiled Shelley, "it won't fail, I will see to that. I guarantee to deprive our hero of his memory. After the operation, he will remain here under observation for a few days, then robbing him of every clue to his identity, we will turn him adrift. He will remember absolutely nothing as to who he is, or what has happened to him."

"Well, get it over," cried Precious. "It's a lot of infernal nonsense in my opinion, a waste of time when one shot from this would settle the matter." He handled his automatic tenderly. "You'd better not delay," he muttered, "or I might be tempted; I want a little practice in the business."

"I can do it, here, now," declared Shelley. "I will chloroform——"

"Chloroform, be hanged!" interrupted Precious. "Let him have his senses so that he will realise what is happening. Otherwise he will not suffer at all. There's enough of us here to hold him down, while you do the job, Shelley. Get hold of him, you lightweights, while Will gets his butchers' tools ready."

CHAPTER XI.

THANKS TO VON WILLMER.

GORDON had remained silent since the arrival of Albrecht and his friends. He tried to think of some way in which he could make another dash for freedom, but with that revolver in the hand of Precious continually threatening, what could he do? But now that he saw those four heavy Huns, drawing near to seize him, he determined to give them a go for it and chance being shot.

The four were weighty, with a flabbiness that quite unfitted them for a rough and tumble struggle, and Jack waited their approach with clenched fists. Rahmann and Bierschenk, threw their bulkiness towards him, their hands outstretched to seize and hold, but both went down gasping, and the other two meeting well-directed and powerful blows from Gordon's fists, followed suit. Precious and Shelley laughed loudly at the fate of their friends, but rushed to the rescue, Precious driving Jack back at the point of his pistol.

"Got a lovely punch in either hand, ain't he?" laughed Precious. "I stopped one to-night, so I know. Have another go, friends; he's yours now, if he punches again I'll shoot."

With a combined rush, they secured Gordon, dragging him to the floor by force of weight and numbers. Holding him with all their strength, they lifted him on to the table, and held him firmly. Precious pressing the automatic to his head, while uttering threats and vile curses. The Doctor placed his instruments close at hand, again suggesting an anæsthetic, but the others, smarting from their bruises, supported Precious in his demand that the operation should be performed whilst Jack was fully conscious.

"All right, I'll do it," agreed Shelley, "but I'd like someone to be handy to get me anything I might want after I have commenced."

"What about Von Willmer," suggested Precious, "I wonder what's become of him. I'd forgotten the old devil. Surely our friend here did not kill him."

"One of you go up and see," said Shelley. "I'll hang on for a moment."

Bierschenk resigned his position to Precious and left the room. For a few moments no one spoke, then Precious grew impatient. "Damn it," he growled. "Get to it, Shelley, we can hold him. He's as quiet as a lamb now, not a kick left in him. Otto seems to have gone for good."

"Very well," assented Shelley, "but see that you hold him tightly. I will have to expose the brain, and the slightest hitch might spoil all."

Jack clenched his teeth, debating with himself whether it would not be better to fight, and let a bullet end the suspense, but he was very weak now,

and the odds were so great. He felt the prick of the Doctor's lance, and closed his eyes.

The prick was not repeated. What was that noise? He opened his eyes. The men around him had raised their heads from him, and with drawn faces were listening.

"Von Willmer!" gasped Shelley, as a roar was heard above them. A sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs, and the door burst open. Otto Bierschenk burst in, and closing the door he leaned his trembling bulk against it.

"Oscar!" he gasped. "He's drunk or mad. I could not find him. I looked around, nothing but empty bottles. Then the door of Fritz Heiden's laboratory open, and he rush out, and chase me, with a bomb or something."

"Lock the door, you fool," ordered Precious, "and stand aside, here he comes, listen to the maniac."

The voice of Oscar Von Willmer was bellowing on the other side of the door now. "Vere is he," he cried. "He vos escape, I vill blow him up." The door cracked as he hurled his weight against it, and Otto sought a safer refuge.

"Here," said Precious, "you hang on here, I'll fix Oscar."

The trembling Bierschenk took hold of Jack, and Precious stood up straight, with his revolver pointing at the door.

Presently it gave to the onslaught of Von Willmer, and he lurched into the room. He was wild-eyed and dishevelled, and in his upraised hand he

held some object at the sight of which the Germans scattered in terror, leaving their victim free.

"Vere is he?" demanded the seeming madman, "I vill him settle mit dis bomb!"

A sharp report, as Precious' automatic spat; a convulsive jerk of Oscar's arm, and the missile left it. A flash, a shooting flame, a bursting sound; some cries of pain, and curses. Then darkness and confusion.

Jack Gordon, in the act of leaving the table as the explosion took place, was hurled to the floor, with a painful stinging sensation in his eyes. He groped around on his knees, and his hand seemed to strike against a warm face. He ran his fingers over it, but it did not flinch, then his hand touched a cap, and he grasped it, and placing it on his head rose to his feet. He could hear a crackling sound, and the smell of smoke was strong, but he could see nothing plainly; there was a sound of scurrying feet, and slamming doors, but no one spoke. As he stood, helpless through his blindness, a hand seized his arm and dragged him away.

"Come on, you fool," snapped a voice that he recognised as that of the Doctor. "Do you want to be cremated? What's wrong, did it get you?"

Gordon did not reply. He allowed the other to lead him. In a moment he felt the night air on his face, and knew that he was out of the house, but still he could not see.

"I seem to be blind," he whispered, weakly.

"Never mind that now, but hurry," ordered his

companion. "Here, put this around your eyes." As they stumbled along he handed Jack a large handkerchief, and grateful for this means of disguise, Gordon concealed his aching eyes and most of his face with it.

"We'll get down to the beach, Charlie, and out to the launch. There'll be hell to pay over this; Gordon's settled, he must have got the full force of that bomb. Fritz was wanting to test his liquid fire grenades, but he didn't dream of this. Whew! she's blazing now."

"Is the house on fire?" ventured Jack.

"You bet it is, and we'll be lucky if we get back and escape being connected with it. I wonder if the others got away?"

Gordon remained silent as he stumbled through what he took to be scrub, and over rocks, clinging to the arm of his enemy. Although seemingly blind, he rejoiced at the fate that had freed him from the attentions of Precious and his friends, and caused this other German to mistake him for his fellow-traitor.

"I'm half blind myself," said Shelley. "Curse that fool, Von Willmer; he always goes mad when he drinks. I suppose the whole neighborhood heard that explosion. I hope he's incinerated along with Gordon, then his prattling tongue can do no more harm."

"Is it a very dark night, or am I really blind?" ventured Jack, still whispering beneath the concealing handkerchief.

"It's dark enough, the Lord knows," answered Shelley, "and foggy, too; I suppose the explosion affected your eyes, it did mine to a certain extent. You'll find it will wear off, Charlie, but you seem to have lost your voice as well. You'll have to buck up; you can't go back to camp like this, you know."

Jack raised his bandage slightly, and his drooping spirits revived greatly, for his eyes felt better, and he hoped that when he dared remove the handkerchief, he would be able to see again. For the present, however, it would be safer to assume blindness. He felt ill and hungry, and realised that he would be no match for Shelley just now, did that fiend awake to the mistake he had made.

The going had become easier. Jack no longer stumbled over stones and stumps, and the ground felt softer to his feet. They must be nearing the beach that his companion spoke of. Soon his feet sank into the sand, and he knew that the first part of their journey was at an end.

"Here we are," said the Doctor. "Sit down, I'll hail Fred, and get him to bring the dingy ashore. He'll not be expecting us, we're before our time."

Gordon sank down on the sand, glad of the rest and a brief respite to think what he had better do. Would he attack and try to overcome his unsuspecting enemy, or wait and see the adventure further? He could not decide the question, and as he sat considering it, really too weak from his long fast even to think coherently, it was answered for him. In response to Shelley's hail, a dinghy grated

on the sand, and another man joined the Doctor.

"It's you, is it?" he heard a gruff voice say. "Vot's der matter mid Sharley; and vere is der fire?"

"Charlie's not too good," said Shelley, "give a hand to get him aboard. The fire is where we've come from, so you'll understand that we're in a hurry."

"Apsley!" grunted the newcomer. "Vot vos happen?"

"I'll tell you all about it when we get aboard," said Shelley, impatiently, "we want to get away. If anyone saw us leave that house, well, it's all up with our trip abroad."

Guided by Shelley on one side, and the strange boatman on the other, Jack entered the dinghy. A short row and the launch was reached. Gordon was assisted aboard, and into the cabin, where he lay on a stretcher, his heart beating quickly, for his plight now was worse than ever. At any moment he might be recognised, and the rest was easy for his unscrupulous enemies. However, he tried to make the best of it, and lay still while the launch was got under way.

Very soon the boat was moving. Outside the cabin the others sat talking softly. Shelley no doubt telling his friend of the night's strange happenings while he directed the course of the motor launch. As the two Huns appeared engrossed in conversation, Gordon sat up and raised the handkerchief from his eyes. A sharp pain shot through them as they encountered the faint ray of light from the

cabin lamp, but he was not blind. He could see, and there was still a hope. Alongside him on a ledge that served for a table was some food. The boatman had evidently been dining. An opened bottle of lager stood handy, and a used glass. Jack was hungry. As far as he could remember he had not eaten since he had had a snack at a country railway station, during his journey from Cooya, and he had lost count of when that was; but it seemed ages. Throwing caution to the winds he ravenously attacked the food that lay to his hand, and drank greedily of the beer. His back was to the door of the cabin, and in the enjoyment of the moment he forgot the danger he was in. At a sound behind him he turned quickly. "Vot you ead mine tucker for?" A grin was on the lips of the speaker, but the expression changed to one of amazement when he saw to whom he spoke. "Ach," he gasped. "Vot der devil! You vos not——" He got no further. The lager bottle in the hand of Jack caught him fairly between the eyes and he went down like a log.

"Hello! What's that?" called Shelley, sharply, from his place at the tiller. For a moment Jack stood irresolute, then catching sight of a switch close by, touched it and the lights went out. Crouching near the fallen German, he waited in the dark, formulating a plan whereby he might gain the upper hand of Shelley and his now unconscious German friend.

Puzzled at the sudden darkness of the cabin, and the silence of his two companions, Shelley left the tiller and crept forward.

"What's up in there?" he asked sharply. For answer a figure rose quickly, and seizing the unsuspecting Doctor, pinned his arms to his sides, and forced him backwards.

"Have you gone mad, Charlie?" gasped Shelley, in astonishment, as he struggled to free himself. "Let me go. I must steer the boat, or we'll be running into something."

"I am not mad, nor have I lost my memory," cried Jack. "I was at your mercy an hour ago, but now the tables are turned."

"Great God!" exclaimed Shelley, "Gordon, by all that's damnable! What a mug I've been. Presch must be dead, for I saw him lying in that burning room and thought it was you."

Jack made no comment, but gripped his man tighter. In desperation Shelley strove to free himself; but all in vain. From side to side they swayed until at last the two fell with a crash across the engine, and the launch, bereft of a guiding hand at the tiller, floundered helplessly.

The Boolaroo, on the final trip to Manly, had encountered a fog, and was cautiously feeling her way through the haze. Great dark shadowy forms loomed up at close quarters, but were safely left behind, and the few passengers slumbered without thought of danger as they were borne slowly homeward. Suddenly three sharp blasts of the steamer's whistle, accompanied by the ringing of the telegraph, and the reversal of the engines, caused the dozing Manlyites to spring from their seats and

rush in alarm to peer over the rail into the murk. A small craft was erratically zig-zagging across the bows of the Boolaroo. A collision was inevitable.

Another blast of the whistle, a shout of warning from a score of throats; then for a moment silence, broken only by the captain's voice shouting orders to the crew. Promptly the men dashed to their places, and the lifeboat was got ready to lower. As it swung out over the water, a searchlight played on the scene from Middle Head, and disclosed what looked like a tragedy.

The crushed fragment of a motor launch floated helplessly. Two men clung to it, but one dropped off and sank ere the Boolaroo's boat touched the water. Once afloat, willingly the rescuers bent to their task, and brought their boat alongside the wreckage. The survivor—a soldier—was lifted aboard. He told of two others who had been with him, but no trace of them could be found. Giving up the search as hopeless, the boat returned to the waiting steamer with the rescued man, the passengers cheering in appreciation of the crews smartness.

On the deck of the Boolaroo, the crowd pressed around inquisitively, but Jack Gordon was uncommunicative. At the invitation of the engineer, he descended to the warmth of the engine-room and boilers, there to strip and dry his soaking uniform.

Tied up at Manly wharf, the Boolaroo discharged her passengers, but being eager to obtain particulars of the collision and the identity of the rescued

soldier, they were loth to leave the pier. Their curiosity remained unsatisfied, however, for Jack remained below, the guest of the captain, and he was glad indeed when the ordeal of an interview with the local police—who had been notified of the disaster from Middle Head—was over, and refreshed with hot coffee, he was able to turn in for the night.

CHAPTER XII.

BALE No. 78.

OPERATIONS at the shearing-shed commenced each morning at six o'clock, and Goulder was invariably in attendance, returning to the house when the bell rang for the men to cease work for breakfast.

The morning following the introduction of Carl Presch as a member of the household proved an exception. At the breakfast table, Sheila and Anne Carroll, with their unwelcome guest, waited in silence for the arrival of the head of the house, and as time wore on, many a troubled glance was exchanged by the two women.

"Where is your father?" asked Presch, at last. "Is he usually so late a riser?"

"My father goes to the shearing-shed at six," answered Sheila, coldly. "Something has delayed him this morning; he will be here presently." But the minutes slipped by and he did not appear. Presch ate his meal with apparent unconcern, but Sheila at last could bear the suspense no longer. "I will go and see if he is in his room," she said to Mrs. Carroll. "I cannot understand what is keeping him."

She left the room, but was back quickly. Her face was blanched, and she was trembling. "He is

not there," she gasped. "His bed has not been used. The drawer where he kept his revolver is open, and it is gone. Oh, whatever does it mean?"

"That man is the cause of it," exclaimed Mrs. Carroll, rising to her feet and indicating Carl. "Your father was scared of him, I'm sure of it.

"You are right," agreed Sheila; "My poor father has not been the same since he came here. Mr. Presch, where is my father?"

Carl stood up and shrugged his shoulders, with an injured air. "How should I know?" he asked. "I slept very soundly indeed last night. No doubt your father had some business to attend to that has taken him away early. He will return soon, I am sure."

He stepped towards the door, and at the same time the maid entered, ushering in a bashful station-hand.

"Jim Brady has come from the shed to speak to the boss," she said.

"Yes, I'd like to see Mr. Goulder for a minute, Miss Sheila. The lads can't make out why he ain't been down."

"He is not here, Jim," said Sheila. "I do not know where he is."

Brady allowed a subdued whistle to escape him. "That's queer, ain't it," he said. "Hans Hoffman turned to at the press this morning, and the men are bucking. They don't like it. They say they won't work with no Germans, especially Hoffman, after what happened the other night."

"And quite right, too," remarked Mrs. Carroll, glaring at Carl Presch.

"So I think," agreed Sheila, "but where is Dillon, Jim?"

"Hoffman says that he deputed him to work for him, as he had business to attend to in town. I reckon there'll be trouble if he stops on."

"In my father's absence, I don't know what to say or do," said Sheila; "but I will come down and see the men."

She ran from the room, bidding Brady wait for her.

"I will see to it," said Presch. "I will go and make the men get on with their work."

"You!" cried Mrs. Carroll. "Do you think they'd stand you bossin' them, when they won't work with a German presser. Don't you poke in where you ain't required."

"But they must pay some attention to me," protested Carl. "I am part owner of Yedden."

Again Brady emitted his whistle of surprise, and Anne Carroll opened her mouth in astonishment at the German's statement.

"Better not interfere, mister, even if what you say is true," advised Brady. "If you're a German, it'll be go for yer life, if th' boys go crook on yer."

Presch uttered a grunt of contempt. "At any rate I will accompany Miss Goulder to the shed," he said. "Then if need be, I will go to Cooya to seek the assistance of the police in finding my old friend, Goulder."

"I am ready, Jim," said Sheila, re-entering the

room. "Come on." Jim Brady hurried after the girl, and Carl followed to see them jump from the verandah, and skelter across the home paddock, at a pace too warm for him to follow. He looked after them, a frown disfiguring his heavy features, then lighting a cigar he too set out for the shearing-shed.

As he went, a motor car speeding towards the homestead arrested his attention. He at once recognised it, for it was his own car driven by Fritz Heiden. "What's brought him along so early," he muttered, pausing. "Something of importance to judge by his pace."

In a moment the car had reached him and pulled up by his side. He stepped in and took a seat alongside Heiden, who was plainly excited.

"The news?" questioned Carl, briefly.

Fritz handed him an envelope. "Bad," he said. "A wire from Albreth, read it."

The message was in code, and Presch went white as he deciphered it.

"Explosion, Apsley. Fire. Rudie; Von Willmer dead. Gordon escaped."

"God!" exclaimed Presch. "This is terrible news. Rudie dead; someone shall suffer for this."

"We're up against it now," said Fritz. "The Lord only knows what will come out of it. I wonder how it happened? Someone must have been interfering with my bombs, curse them."

"You're sure to be wanted, being the tenant of Apsley," remarked Presch. "They'll discover now

that Fred Heyden and Fritz Heiden are one and the same."

"No doubt they will," agreed Heiden, setting his teeth. "Well, let them; I'm not going back yet; let them find me."

A team of bullocks drawing an empty waggon lumbered by the stationary car.

"For a load of wool," whispered Carl; "we'll get rid of last night's work quickly. Drive along to the shed; there's trouble brewing there. The absence of Goulder has got them wondering."

Arrived at the shed the two men entered. Sheila was standing facing the men, who had ceased their work, and were respectfully regarding her. Apparently she had just finished speaking to them, and their spokesman was about to reply, when the entrance of the strangers caused a diversion. A storm of hoots and groans greeted them, which Carl acknowledged with an ironical bow, as he glanced around towards the wool-press. Several bales newly pressed stood near, and as Carl looked the presser, Hans Hoffman, placed a hand on one of them, and Presch understood. That bale bore a number now, and the two figures 78, burned themselves into the brain of both the Germans, never to be forgotten.

Without giving Carl and his companion any further attention, Tom Darcy, the shearers' spokesman, addressed Sheila. "For your sake, Miss Sheila, we will see Yedden cut out," he said, "but we object to Hoffman, and we will not be interfered with by these Germans here."

"Id is all ride, Miss," interjected Hoffman. "I only vork to oblige Darby. I knock off now at once. I no trouble vill cause. A team has this minute come, I vill see him load, then you can another presser ged. Ain't that ride?"

"Will that suit you, men," asked Sheila.

"Yes, that's good enough," agreed Darcy. "A cheer for Miss Shelia, boys, and we'll get to it again."

The cheer was given, and groans for the Germans followed, but they heeded not as they walked from the shed after Sheila. Outside Carl spoke.

"Miss Goulder," he said, respectfully. "Believe me, we are truly sorry for your trouble. We will do all in our power to help you. My car is at your disposal. Let me drive you into Cooya, and——"

"No, no," cried Sheila, turning on Presch with flashing eyes. "Do not speak to me. I do not want your car. I have my own. I hate you, for you have driven my father to his death."

She did not wait, but hurried away, and looking after her, Carl showed his teeth in a snarl of anger. "She'll take taming, Fritz," he growled, "but I'll bend her to my will before many more days have passed."

"My advice would be to let her alone," said Heiden. "We have enough on our hands now without adding a woman to the load."

"Bosh!" snapped Presch. "I've set my heart on that girl, and I mean to have her whatever happens."

For a while they lingered, watching the busy workers rolling bales of wool from the shed to

load the waiting waggon. Then they entered their car, and made their way to the home of Hans Hoffman, where waited upon by the handsome Australian wife of Hoffman, they idled the morning away. Drinking deeply of their friend's wine, they discussed in their own language the disaster that had happened at their City headquarters, wondering what it portended for them, until Fritz thought it time for him to leave to meet the mail at Cooya.

Soon after his departure Hans Hoffman joined Presch, and on his heels came the lumbering bullock waggon, laden with Yedden wool. The two watched the team go by in silence, but each could read the other's thoughts, for high up, forming the apex of the load, one bale was perched, and it bore the figures 78.

As they gazed, a motor car sped by from the opposite direction. Presch grasped his companion's arm and squeezed it savagely, for Sheila Goulder was at the wheel, and by her side sat Jack Gordon.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACK'S RETURN.

NEVER before had Sheila felt the want of a friend. Her father had been all in all to her; she had looked to him all through life, never allowing herself to dwell on the thought that some day he would surely be taken from her.

That day had come with shocking suddenness while she was surrounded by enemies, and the mysterious manner of his going had unnerved her badly. She was quite convinced that he was dead, and her first duty seemed to be to endeavour to bring to book those whom she deemed responsible for his death.

Leaving Presch and Fritz Heiden at the shed, she hurried home, dressed for the road, and in a little while was flying along alone in her car, bound for Cooya, to tell her trouble to Inspector Harvey, who was in charge of the local police, and consult Bryan Osmond, the local representative of her father's solicitors.

The Inspector received her kindly, was very sympathetic, but shook his head doubtfully when she maintained that her father's disappearance was due to the machinations of Carl Presch and his German friends.

"I do not think that your suspicions are just, Miss Goulder," he said, quietly. "I must confess that I am not one who sees any great danger from the fact that our district has so many German settlers. I know them all well, and they are in-offensive and law-abiding people."

"No doubt they are in ordinary times," declared Sheila, "but not now. While they imagine Germany is winning the war, they have become arrogant and insulting, and are a danger that will have to be dealt with firmly."

"I think you are wrong, Miss Goulder," said the old Inspector, "but do not worry about your father. I'll get my men to work at once, and I am sure that there will soon be some news for you."

Sheila left him and sought the home of Bryan Osmond, a clever solicitor, who had been unable to pursue a lucrative career in the City on account of failing health, and had drifted outback. Her visit surprised him, and he listened to her story in amazement.

"The poor old Dad," he exclaimed. "I am sorry, he must have been worried greatly to leave the old home like that. I am afraid you are right. This Presch and his gang of Huns; they want watching closely. However, we need not despair, your father will have to be found; meanwhile there must be someone in authority at Yedden. Someone to take charge until things are put right again."

"Carl Presch claims that he is part-owner of Yedden."

"How so?"

"By the right of some old partnership that existed between himself and my father. They came here together, you know, over twenty years ago."

"Yes, I know," said Osmond, "but let him prove his claim in a proper manner if your father disputes it. Until he does that he must keep away and not force his company on you. You had better stop here with us for a day or two. Mrs. Osmond will see that you are comfortable. If I cannot get someone suitable to look after the station, I'll go myself."

"I am very, very thankful to you," declared Sheila, "but I could not stop away just now. I'll have plenty of protectors; the men will stick to me, I'm sure of that."

"At your command they'd tear the German limb from limb," exclaimed the lawyer; "but have some lunch. We'll talk after."

Sheila dined with the Osmonds, her intention being to wait for the coach, and take possession of the Yedden mail. Jack Gordon had been gone almost a week now, and it seemed years. Surely she would get a letter to-day, she thought as she waited in the little garden in front of the solicitor's home. Her mind was full of the day so recent, when, her heart well-nigh bursting with expectant happiness, she had waited with her father for that same old vehicle, invested for the moment with an unwonted glory, for it was bearing to her arms her hero lover.

How different everything was to-day. Her father

absent; no lover to greet her. Overwhelmed with sorrow she waited alone. At last the rattle of the ancient waggonette, called by courtesy a coach, was heard. Gradually it drew nearer, and as it did Sheila's heart began to flutter strangely, for alongside the driver, as on that other day on which she had been thinking, a soldier sat. For a moment she imagined that her mind was playing tricks with her, or that she was dreaming, but no, she was wide awake, and that uniformed man was indeed Jack Gordon. Her lover had returned to her, and the world looked good again.

The coach drew up as she ran from the gate, and Jack sprang eagerly down to meet her, and oblivious of curious onlookers, clasped her to him.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "But how did you know, dear? How did you guess I was coming?"

"I did not know," returned Sheila, "and I could not believe my eyes; but how ill you look, Jack."

"I am as right as the bank," he said. "But you—you look so pale, and you are trembling. What has happened? Has that scoundrel, Carl Presch, harmed you?"

"No, Jack, I am all right; but Dad—I don't know what to say. He's gone."

"Gone!" echoed Jack, aghast.

"Come in, you two," called Mrs. Osmond, from the cottage door.

Awakened to their surroundings, the lovers accepted the invitation, then Mrs. Osmond left them, for she knew that the two had much to talk about.

Jack heard Sheila's story first, and agreed that the coming of Presch had been responsible for her father's strange absence.

"There's no doubt, at all," he exclaimed. "Presch knows well enough what has become of him, and I will force him to speak. If his plans had not miscarried, I too would be missing or worse, for I was marked as a victim of his hatred."

Bryan Osmond joined them in response to a call from Gordon, and listened amazed as Jack related his remarkable experiences.

"You are indeed a lucky man to come through safely," exclaimed the lawyer. "You will want to be doubly careful now, for they'll get you, if possible."

"I know it," agreed Gordon, "and I have the arch-Hun of the gang to deal with here. I was mad to get back, I can tell you, for I did not relish the idea of Presch being under the same roof as Miss Goulder, though I did not dream that she had lost the protection of her father."

Sheila squeezed her lover's hand sympathetically. "I am not afraid of him, Jack," she said, "but I wanted you back, to help me find Dad."

"Well, Jack, you had better take on the management of Yedden again," said Osmond. "As legal representative of Mervyn Goulder, I will place you in charge, and if Carl Presch tries to push in, fire him."

"I'll take it on," said Jack, "though my time will be short, for I might get my marching orders at

any moment. Why not come out with us to Yedden, yourself and Mrs. Osmond. If Presch becomes troublesome I can deal with him physically, but you can talk law to him, which might have more effect."

And so it was arranged, but Carl did not come to Yedden that night.

CHAPTER XIV.

TESS HOFFMAN TRANSLATES.

FLUSHED with wine, Carl and Hans Hoffman still sat smoking, when Heiden returned from Cooya.

"Some letters?" queried Presch, eagerly. "What is the news? You look most serious, comrade, try some of Hans' excellent wine."

"These are serious times," returned Heiden, as he drank. "Yes, I have letters for you, Count, and I have brought the City papers; they are of great interest to us all."

He handed two letters to Carl, and a copy of an evening paper, indicating a heavy head-lined column, which Presch read eagerly.

THE ENEMY IN OUR MIDST.

SENSATIONAL GERMAN MENACE STORY.

Lieutenant Gordon, the returned wounded soldier, who was rescued from the launch after its collision with the Manly steamer, as related in another column, told a sensational story to the police and also the Military Commandant to-day.

The authorities are as usual uncommunicative, but we have gleaned the following facts:—

Gordon alleges that he escaped from a house in Mosman, the headquarters of a group of Germans, amongst whom were two officers of the A.I.F. Bombs had been manufactured on the premises, and an explosion took place, setting fire to the house. In the confusion, in the dark, Gordon was mistaken by one of the officers present for his companion, owing to a similarity of uniform, and the fact that Gordon had become possessed of the other's cap. The alleged German spy assisted Gordon, who was almost blinded by the explosion, to the waterside, where they boarded a dinghy and were taken on to a launch. While under way Gordon was recognised. The officer attacked him, and it was during the struggle that the collision took place, Gordon being subsequently rescued. The two officers named by Lieutenant Gordon are missing from camp, and the police are dragging in the vicinity of the collision, and searching the ruins of "Apsley," the destroyed bungalow in Bradley's Head Road, as it is believed that at least two men perished in the fire.

Gordon was recently before the Police Court at Cooya, in connection with a disturbance between the hands at Yedden Station and some German farmers, and he states that he was detained by Germans in Sydney acting on instructions received from their friends in the country.

"But he will not go back," declared Presch, savagely. "We must not bungle the job, like those fools in Sydney; let us see what they have to say." He opened a letter and the three read with interest an account of all that had happened at "Apsley" on the night of the fire, and the reading did not bring them any comfort.

"I suppose the City press will have more news of Yedden by this time," remarked Heiden. "The disappearance of Squatter Goulder will be another head-liner for them."

"And, of course, they will connect one affair with the other, curse them," growled Carl; "let us read

this other letter, also from comrade Albrecht, but written before the burst-up. Ah! some instructions from the executive. What do you think of it, my friends?" Heiden took the letter and read it, frowning the while. "Umph!" he grunted. "Pretty hot, Count, eh?"

"Yes," agreed Carl, "but I'm for carrying out the orders, though, of course, suspicion must fall on us."

"That will not matter, as we are already under suspicion," said Fritz. "As well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. With the help of friends here, we'll do this thing, and open the eyes of Australia. What do you say, Hans?"

Hoffman had also read the order, and his dull eyes lit up. "For der Faderland," he said, earnestly, "my live und liberty I vill gif."

Presch filled the glasses once again with sparkling wine, and proposed a toast. The three men rose. "Hoch der Kaiser!" cried Presch, and his fellow-Germans repeated the words loudly, while a white-faced, trembling woman peered in upon them from the partly opened door of her room.

* * * *

The night was passed peacefully at Yedden homestead. Though stricken with grief for her missing father, Sheila, under the watchful eye of Anne Carroll, slept like a tired and happy child. She had no fear, for beneath the same roof her soldier-lover reposed, ready to defend her from any danger.

At daybreak Gordon made his way to the shearing-shed, to take over his old job, much to the joy of

the hands, who cheered him lustily. "It will not be for long, boys," said Jack. "You're nearly cut out; but I expect to see the finish, though I'm liable to be ordered back to France any day now."

"Good luck to you, Jack," shouted Tom Darcy. "I'm going to have a bit of it too, and a lot more of us as well. We'll all be wanted, but we'd like to see these bally Huns around us safe behind the barbed wire before we leave our sweethearts and wives to their mercy."

Darcy had voiced a view that was popular, and his statement was loudly applauded.

"Put 'em in, and we'll all go, quick and lively," cried another shearer, and again there were cheers.

"I agree with you, lads," said Jack. "I can understand your reluctance to enlist, and leave your farms, and your womenfolk, to fight and die, while these Germans are allowed unrestricted freedom. It should not be. We must continue to agitate, and demand the internment of the subjects of an enemy country that yearns to lay waste, to slaughter and outrage, in England and Australia, as it did in Belgium."

The ringing of the bell prevented further discussion, and work commenced and proceeded merrily.

Gordon paced the shed restlessly. He found it hard to settle down calmly to the supervising duties of the Boss of the Board, but as he had agreed to fill the gap caused by the absence of Mervyn Goulder, he had to make the best of it, though he would have preferred his freedom just now. One

moment his mind was away in Sydney, and he was wondering how the enquiries regarding the burning of "Apsley" and the harbor collision were progressing. The next he was trying to fathom the mystery of the disappearance of Squatter Goulder; and while his mind dwelt on these matters he could not concentrate on the work in hand.

The local police, aided by trackers, were scouring the country in connection with this latter affair, but Jack had little faith in the police or their theories; besides their absence gave an opportunity for other dastardly deeds by Presch and his associates.

Even with the breaks for breakfast and smoko, the morning dragged; but dinner at the homestead was interrupted by an incident that foreboded serious trouble.

A woman, pale, tearful, and sorely troubled, was ushered in. It was Tess Hoffman, the Australian wife of Farmer Hans.

"What is it, Tess?" asked Sheila, kindly. "You are tired and out of breath. Sit down and rest. I will get you a cup of tea."

"Do not bother, please," said Tess, "I have hurried all the way from home. It is terrible, Miss, to be married to a German now that the war has come. I want to be loyal to my husband. He has always been good to me, and loved me I am sure, till this awful war. Now he thinks and talks of nothing but hate for all who are British, and of

what the Germans here in Australia will do to help the Fatherland."

"It is indeed a trying time for you, Mrs. Hoffman," interposed Jack, sympathetically.

"All night," continued Tess, "he has had those men from Sydney with him, and Joe Unger, and Adolf Wehlen also. They drank much wine, and talked in German. I listened, but they spoke so quickly, and I do not understand the language too well, though Hans taught me to read it. For hours Fritz Heiden and my Hans were in the workshop making something. Heiden is a chemist, I have heard, and my husband also understands a great deal. Early this morning, Wehlen and Joe Unger went away, and I understood the orders given to them."

"Yes," queried Jack, eagerly. "What were they?"

"To cut your telephone wire, and the telegraph lines from Cooya to Wagga."

"Whatever for?"

"About an hour ago, my husband with those City Germans went away, and Hans was so strange to me, that I was afraid something terrible would happen. I tried not to worry, and set about my work, and when cleaning up the room they had been in I found this."

She held out a letter to Jack, with a trembling hand, and as he took it, she buried her face in her hands and sobbed. "He was a good husband," she moaned, "and the father of my children, but I cannot be loyal to him, and let my own flesh and blood perish."

"What do you mean," demanded Jack. "I cannot read this, it is written in German; you say that you can read the language——"

"I forgot," gasped Tess. "Give it to me, I will read it for you."

Gordon handed her the note, and she seized it roughly, crushing it in her hand. "No, no," she cried. "I will not read it. I will not betray my husband."

She rose to go, but Sheila putting her arms around her gently forced her to resume her seat. "Now, Tess, dear," she murmured, "be reasonable, you have run all the way from your house to tell us something, and now you won't. Besides you have said enough for us to gather that your husband and his friends are engaged in some work against us whom they consider their enemies."

"Curse those men," burst out Tess, her manner changing. "Why did they come here to tempt him. He is simple, he believes all they say, for they are officers in the pay of their country. I will read this letter, though it is too late now for anything to be done."

Eagerly Sheila and Jack listened, while the distraught woman slowly translated the German words of the letter Carl Presch had received the previous day.

Comrade,—Your report to hand. So far good, but you must do more. Here are two suggestions. A thousand soldiers leave Sydney for Melbourne at 6 a.m. on the day after you receive this. Yibbi

Bridge is forty miles from Yedden. Figure out when troop-train should pass over, and——

"They have left the rest blank," said Tess, "but the meaning is plain. They mean to blow up the bridge. They have taken a battery and coils of wire and explosives. My own two brothers are in camp; perhaps they will be in that train, and all those boys will be killed. Can nothing be done to save them——"

Gordon was as white as the women, and his hand shook as he consulted the watch on his wrist. "God knows if we will be in time," he said. "They left an hour ago, you say?"

"Yes," she moaned, "it must be that."

"And is that all of the letter?"

"There is a little more," returned the woman, "it concerns the wheat:

"When harvested the record wheat crop will go to Britain. Much wheat grows near Yedden, and it should burn well. It is left for you to strike for Fatherland."

"That is all," said Tess.

"And the signature?"

"There is none. See a stamp only has been used; the German Eagle."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hoffman," said Jack. "You have had a hard task, but you have acted rightly, though if the proposed outrage is to be carried out to-day, God help those boys, for I fear that we cannot."

"But, we'll try," exclaimed Sheila. "My car is fast and——"

"Of course we'll try, and without delay," agreed Jack. "Get the car ready, Sheila, I'll run down and send some men to search the bush for the police. The 'phone is useless now. Bring the car along and pick me up; we may get there in time to warn the train, and save those boys."

CHAPTER XV.

TO STOP THE TRAIN.

ONCE more the shearing was interrupted. Jack's sensational news put all thoughts of work from the men's minds. All wanted to dash away to the rescue, but forty miles on horseback was no joke. One, Tom Darcy, was the proud possessor of a motor cycle, and with a mate up behind he was soon on the road, while others with ordinary bikes set out after him. Of the rest, some galloped off to try and locate the police, who were engaged in a vain search for some trace of the missing master of Yedden, and others started on a wild dash for Cooya, hoping by some means to get a message through to Wagga and acquaint the railway people of the threatened train-wreck.

The road to Yibbi was rough and broken up through recent heavy rains, but Sheila drove her car at the very top of its speed, leaving the shearer-cyclists far behind. Gordon had calculated that in a little less than an hour from the time he boarded the car, the troop-train—did it leave at the time stated in the letter Tess had read, and had an uninterrupted passage—would be dashing over Yibbi Bridge. If they could not reach there before that happened, Carl Presch and his confederates would have indeed struck a blow for their Fatherland.

About half a mile on the Yedden side of the railway line the road crossed the river by means of a bridge, and their plan was to cross this and intercept the train where the road crossed the line some distance beyond.

Dreading disaster from the excessive speed at which they were travelling on a rough and dangerous road, but not daring to slacken even a little, for every moment was precious, the lovers sat in enforced silence, Jack gazing in admiration at the girl who grasped the steering wheel with grim determination showing in every feature of her pretty face. He felt that he was only playing second fiddle, but he did not dare suggest that they should change places; he could only hope that they would get through safely, and be in time. Nearer they drew to where the road curved as it approached the river. As they swerved round the bend Jack looked again at his watch, straining his ears the while to catch the sound of an approaching train.

"Ten minutes, Sheila," he shouted, standing up and looking ahead. "We'll do it yet. I can see the bridge now, and no sign of a train." He resumed his seat, and pressed Sheila's arm reassuringly. "I'd slow down to cross," he advised. "The bridge is narrow, you know, dear and——"

"We're all right," said Sheila, disregarding the advice. "I'll get across."

Gordon stood up again to look ahead. He did not protest at his sweetheart's daring, but he was beginning to feel uneasy; suddenly he clutched her

arm excitedly. "God above, Sheila," he exclaimed, "Pull up, there's no bridge there, pull up or we'll be in the river."

Sheila cleverly brought the car to a standstill. "What do you mean, Jack?" she demanded.

"Look for yourself, dear," he replied.

"The bridge has gone," she gasped. "Whatever could have happened?"

"Our Hun friends, I expect," said Gordon. "They've destroyed this bridge so as to cut off pursuit from the other side, after dealing with the railway bridge; that's what it looks like to me." Whatever the reason, the bridge was now an impassable ruin, and crossing the river was out of the question.

"We're not beat yet," exclaimed Sheila. "I'll run through the scrub to the line, cross the bridge and wave the train to stop."

Gordon looked at her admiringly. If this is the spirit of a daughter of Australia, he thought, no wonder the sons have made good. "Just a minute, girlie," he said, "and we'll see what we can do. I'd like to spot Count Carl, and his fellow Huns, before they catch sight of us; they might be watching us all the time."

From the car he swept the scrub between them and the line with the glasses. "I see their car," he whispered. "It's well hidden in the bushes, and you can bet the men are not far away. Come on, we'll cross that bridge together."

They left the car, and cautiously worked their

way through the scrub, fearful that at any moment the men concealed therein might discover their presence.

"Wait a bit," whispered Jack, after they had gone a short distance. "You go on alone, dear; I'll see if I can get on their track, and bag Carl and the others before they do further mischief."

With a parting hand-squeeze the lovers parted, the girl making her way towards the train track, while Gordon advanced cautiously in the direction of where he judged the Germans to be.

* * * *

To carry out the suggestions contained in the letter received from their Sydney headquarters, Presch and his two chosen companions motored out to Yibbi, under the guidance of Hans. They were determined to successfully carry out the proposed murderous scheme of wrecking the troop-train, carrying a thousand or more recruits from Sydney to Melbourne. On their way they passed between paddocks, where as far as the eye could see, the waving wheat, almost ready for the harvesting, stretched before them.

"On our return," said Fritz Heiden, nodding towards the wheat crops. "It will look pretty to-night as the flames devour it."

"Some belong to our countrymens," muttered Hans. "Ve vill not explode von bomb in that."

"It is all the same," growled Carl. "Whoever owns it, it will go to feed our enemies, so must be destroyed."

They had allowed themselves ample time, and on arrival they had some leisure to look about and select a suitable spot for their operations. The car was driven off the road and hidden in a clump of bushes; and the gear they had brought was taken out and examined.

"I hope it will act," said Carl.

"No doubt of it," said Heiden emphatically. "The charge is powerful enough to demolish a bridge many times larger than this one, and the battery will not fail us, everything is in order."

"Vy nod try it on der road pridge," suggested Hoffman. "Dere vos no house near to hear der exblosiön, and ve cut off der communigations. No von den can us chaze, from over dere; vot you tink?"

"A good suggestion," commented Presch. "We'll do it, Hans. Come along, Fritz, as Hans says, we cannot be pursued from the other side, after the bridge goes up, if we destroy this other one, and it will test our gear." The job did not occupy many minutes. The charge was laid and fired, and the old traffic bridge, after its many years of usefulness, was a hopeless wreck.

The three surveyed their work with satisfaction for a few moments, then they left the ruin to turn their attention to the bigger job that they had undertaken.

CHAPTER XVI.

HE DIED FOR FATHERLAND.

YIBBI Railway Bridge was a long one, for the watercourse was wide. It did not often contain as much water as now, but heavy rain had fallen in the hills of late, and the river was almost a banker.

Heiden placed his battery and electrical gear in the scrub near the river bank, and with the assistance of Hans Hoffman, he carried wires up the railway embankment and along underneath the bridge. In the centre of the structure they placed a drum containing their powerful explosive and attached the wires to terminals affixed thereon, all having been carefully prepared at the house of Hans the previous night.

So much accomplished, they rejoined Presch, and with a bottle of wine and some biscuits to refresh themselves, they waited. Carl anxiously consulted his watch every few minutes.

"Not long, comrades," he would say. "Soon we will hear the whistle. The train will take the

bridge. Then one simple touch of a finger, and we are rid of a thousand of the enemy."

"Ach!" exclaimed Hans. "It will be von grand blow to have struck, vot? Der Kaiser will be rejoiced to hear that, although so far away, ve fights for Yermany. To us der Iron Cross will be award."

Suddenly Heiden clutched Carl's arm, and squeezed it roughly. "Look!" he whispered. "Someone on the bridge, and by God, it's a woman."

Presch rose to his knees, and pressed a pair of field glasses to his eyes, and what he saw surprised him greatly.

A woman was making a risky journey across the bridge, stepping lightly from sleeper to sleeper. "Sheila Goulder," he cried. "What in Hell's name is she crossing there for?"

"There is no other way to cross," said Heiden, excitedly. "She is wise to our plan, and is going to stop that train."

"She must not get across then," snapped Presch, drawing his revolver. "You stand by the switch, Hans; come on Fritz, we must stop that girl."

He rushed towards the bridge, and Heiden, also drawing a revolver, followed.

As they drew near the bridge, the whistle of a train sounded faintly in the distance.

"It's coming!" panted Carl; "if she gets across—"

The snap of Heiden's revolver interrupted.

"Curse it," cried Fritz, "the ironwork of the bridge protects her. Call out to Hans to let her go and blow the fool to Hell; the train will dash

into the river, and that will serve our purpose, for few can escape. Gott in Himmel; look——”

Presch turned at the other's bidding, and as he did a figure leapt from behind a bush and hurled itself on Hans who knelt beside the battery. Hoffman fell backward, with his assailant on top of him, and Carl rushed quickly towards them, with revolver ready to shoot down the newcomer. On their feet quickly the combatants closed, fighting willingly, each striving to overcome and throw the other. A whistle shrieked close at hand, and as he struggled, Jack glanced towards the bridge. Sheila was almost over, and the train was in sight bearing swiftly down upon her. Wrestling frantically, Hans sought now to free himself, and lurched towards the battery; but Gordon was his equal once again, and round and round they twisted in the combat. Again that shrieking whistle—louder now, for the train was close. Surely they had seen Sheila on the line.

Gordon looked again, and his eye caught the menacing weapon of Carl Presch. Quickly he twisted Hans into line with the gun. It snapped once, twice. A convulsive jerk of the huge body in his arms, a grunt of pain. The encircling arms gripped him tighter, and the falling body dragged him with a crash to earth. Right across the battery they fell, and the dull roar, as of a thunder-clap, told that the current had made contact, and done the work expected.

A cloud of smoke, a crash of falling timber. Jack

Gordon, pinned down by the heavy German, looked and saw that the Yibbi Bridge, intact but an instant before, was now a torn and battered ruin. For the moment he cared not for that, nor did the safety of the train concern him. His one thought was of Sheila, and he cursed himself for having allowed her to risk her life in such a way.

Exerting all his power, he threw that load from off him, and sprang to his feet, still prepared to fight, but he had no adversary now, for Hans was dead, and the living Germans had fled precipitately with the roar of the explosion. A first impulse was to rush to the car, and pursue the escaping Huns, but thoughts of Sheila held him back. He must find her at once. Let the murderers escape if they could.

Across the river he could see the stationary train, with its soldier-passengers leaping from it, and running towards the engine, where a crowd had gathered. He must get across, and quickly. Both bridges were now impassable, but he did not hesitate. Throwing off coat and cap he plunged into the running stream, and struck out. Unencumbered with clothes he would have thought but little of such an undertaking, but under the present conditions it proved a severe struggle indeed. Reaching the other side after an exhausting swim, he had to rest a while to recover from his exertion. He did not linger long, and continuing his journey, he ran to where a crowd of soldiers were grouped together, and in their midst, a flushed and embarrassed girl stood bewildered. At sight of him,

Sheila broke from the crowd with a hysterical cry of relief, and regardless of the crowd, threw herself sobbing into his arms.

The breakdown was but momentary. "Miss Goulder has had a trying experience," explained Jack, "enough to upset anyone's nerves."

"I should think so," agreed an officer. "We have to thank her for being alive, judging by the condition of the bridge. I did not think there was any danger of this sort in Australia."

"The enemy is here, ready and willing to commit any outrage," declared Gordon. "What further proof is needed than this. We found out that an attempt was to be made to wreck this train by certain Germans, and Miss Goulder and myself set out to warn you. We were pushed for time, and delayed by the wrecking of the traffic bridge, across there, but though we did not prevent the destruction of the bridge, if it had not been for Miss Goulder, very few of you would have escaped.

"And the men that did it, these Germans you speak of," asked the O.C., "where are they?"

"Two are miles away, travelling over the hills there in a fast car," said Jack. "Another lies in the scrub on the other side of the river, dead."

"They must be caught," cried the officer. "We must not let the wretches escape. You have a car, you say?"

"Yes, Miss Goulder's car is on the other side," returned Jack, "but there is no way of crossing, as both bridges are down, except as I did."

The officer gazed away across the hills through his field-glasses. "Out of sight," he muttered; "but what is that smoke over there, a bush fire?"

One look sufficed for Gordon to see that it was no ordinary bush fire. "The wheat!" he gasped. "Those fiends have fired it, and we are powerless to check it."

"We must do something," said the officer. "I have a company of engineers with me, they will find a way of crossing the river." He gave a few brief orders to his staff, and resumed the conversation with Gordon. "I have sent a motor cyclist back to report the stoppage," he said, "and warn any train that might be following. Meanwhile we must make the best of it, for we're sure to be hung up for quite a while."

Changing his wet garments for a suit kindly offered by one of the officers, Jack turned to help the busy squad who had started to re-bridge the Yibbi. Quickly the axes of the experts were playing havoc with the saplings, a number of which were lashed together with rope and strips of stringy bark. Cross pieces were skilfully placed in position, and deft hands speedily improvised a foot-bridge, capable of carrying a body of men across the river. Swimmers took ropes attached to the structure across, and it was hauled over the gap where the traffic bridge had been destroyed, and lashed to what supports still remained. The work had been accomplished with wonderful speed, and in an incredible short space of time, men were

streaming across to the other side of the river. Arming themselves with boughs they rushed to fight the fierce flames that were ravaging the golden wheat crops.

Jack and Sheila, accompanied by two officers, hurried to the spot where the car had been left. A motor cycle stood near it, and Tom Darcy met them with a long face.

"What is it, Tom?" demanded Sheila.

"The dogs!" he said. "They've done your car in, Miss, blown the motor to bits. We had a breakdown on the road, and the Germans went past as I was fixing my bike. They're travelling and no error. Anyone hurt?"

"Hans Hoffman is dead," replied Jack; "Miss Goulder warned the train in time, but the bridge went up."

"Good on yer, Miss," cried Tom, admiringly to Sheila, who was gazing at her beloved car, with tears in her eyes. "Don't worry about the car, jump on my bike behind Jack and get home, you've done enough for one day. We'll bring a team out tomorrow and tow the motor back to Yedden."

The advice was good. Something must be done to get on the track of the escaping Huns. Gordon took the motor cycle with a word of thanks. "Can you hang on, dear?" he whispered to Sheila, and she nodded bravely, as she joined him.

Night came on quickly. Those of the stranded soldiers who were not fighting the flames lit fires and crouched around them to wait for the relief

train that was being sent to pick them up. An early moon shone down on the strange scene, and undisturbed in the scrub, with white upturned face, the stiffened body of Hans Hoffman lay. He was one of the Hunnish breed, but in death he was not repulsive. A smile was on the cold, lifeless face, for Hans was content; he had died for Fatherland.

CHAPTER XVII.

BACK TO THE CITY.

WHEN the current, switched on by the falling body of Hoffman, made contact with the bomb and blew up the Yibbi Bridge, Presch and his comrade, without waiting to ascertain the result of their dastardly deed, or the fate of Hans, rushed towards their hidden car to try and make good their escape. Though their hurry was great, they spared time to pause and render the Yedden car useless, so that pursuit would be effectually delayed. That much done, they did not linger, and as they flew along the road, between the wheat paddocks, Fritz Heiden stood up and threw his grenades of liquid fire into the crops, and as each fell and the flames leapt up, Fritz cheered his own success, and strafed his enemies with many a fiendish curse.

Pausing at Yedden, Carl took possession of his bag, jeering at the powerless Mrs. Carroll as he bade her good-bye, with threats of an early return. Again at Hoffman's house they stopped for something that had been left there, and to the terror-stricken Tess they coarsely jested with regard to her missing husband. Into Cooya they boldly drove, picked up their belongings, and dashed away in safety.

The police did not locate them. Aided by their long start, they got clear away, no doubt finding refuge with staunch friends who would not betray.

Many days had passed, and disguised and bearing English names, the two were in the city of Sydney. Unsuspected they waited for a chance to strike again.

* * * * *

To-night was a night of congratulation. From the window of their elevated flat they had seen a sight that filled them with a morbid joy, for it proved especially to Fritz Heiden that they had not laboured in vain. A big wool store by the waterside was on fire, and the flames defied all human efforts to combat them.

Fritz had discovered some days since that Yedden wool was in that store, and had hoped for this. The solution he had solidified and which had been introduced into the fleeces was doing its work, and doing it well. This fire would be termed "mysterious" by the press, and the cause of the outbreak would remain a mystery to all but certain Germans.

Nowadays both Presch and Heiden were worried and haggard in appearance, despite an air of bravado which they both assumed, but which deceived neither. Each knew the turmoil of mind that his comrade was suffering from, and they drank deeply in a vain endeavour to still their restless consciences.

Tired at length of watching the fire, Fritz sat back to scan the evening paper. Presently he emitted a low whistle to attract the attention of his companion. "Listen to this, comrade," he said. "It will please you."

Lieutenant Gordon, who has been greatly in the lime-light of late, in connection with local enemy sensations, has been recalled to rejoin his regiment in France.

Readers will recall the part he played in the sensational happenings which led to the death of two of the enemy who had obtained commissions in the ranks of the A.I.F., and which led to the investigations which are still proceeding.

With Miss Goulder, he gallantly frustrated the attempt to wreck a troop-train at Yibbi, and though the railway bridge was destroyed, a thousand lives were saved. Now the captivating Miss Goulder is to become the wife of the gallant officer, and the wedding will take place before he sails for England. Miss Goulder is staying at the Hotel Allies, but is adverse to publicity.

As he listened a paroxysm of rage distorted the now bearded features of Carl Presch. "He shall not have that girl," he cried passionately. "I will beat him for her yet. I'll risk everything to tear her from him."

"Rot!" snapped Heiden protestingly. "Don't be a fool. Let him have the girl, and be damned to him. We've been caused enough trouble through them already. For my part I wish I had never heard the name of Goulder."

"Umph," sneered Carl. "Conscience pricks, eh? Are you haunted by the ghost of the man in the wool-bale? That killing was no more a murder than the slaying of a soldier by one of the enemy. We were fighting for our country; Goulder attacked us and fell."

"You may persuade yourself to take that view of it," said Fritz, "but a judge and jury will look at it in a different light, if the truth is ever discovered."

"Only you and I know that, now that Hoffman is dead, and let us hope that bale number 78 has been consumed in the fire that we have been watching."

"I hope so indeed," said Heiden, "and it is more than likely that it started it, for of all those bales we dealt with that one should be the first to fire."

They smoked on in silence for a while, then Carl spoke again. "I saw Rudolph Rahmann to-day," he said. "He told me that he had managed to secure berths for himself and two ladies in the *Shelford*; but that his wife was ill and could not go. He will have to forfeit. I will take over his berths."

"You!"

"Why not, I want to get away, and no one will suspect that Charles Preston is the much-sought-for Carl Presch. I can pass for a Britisher anywhere."

"I know," agreed Fritz. "But the ladies?"

"Sheila Goulder and a chaperon, my boy. I will make that girl my wife, and when things are as they were, we will return and live at Yedden."

Fritz shook his head in protest. "Cut it out, Count," he advised. "You know that I have work in hand that calls for your assistance."

"There are others," growled Presch. "I will serve better in another country; I will go through with this scheme of mine. With your help I will act at once."

"What do you want me to do?"

For answer Carl pushed pen, ink and paper towards him. "You are an expert in the art of forgery," he said. "A regular Jim the Penman, and you shall forge for me, comrade. See, here is an old letter written by Mervyn Goulder. In a copy of that handwriting I wish you to write a letter to my dictation."

Refusal was in Heiden's mind; but his eyes met the fierce commanding gaze of his stronger willed comrade. Grasping the pen sullenly he prepared to obey.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PRESCH SCORES AGAIN.

THE sensational happenings, beginning with the burning of "Apsley," and culminating in the blowing up of Yibbi Bridge, and the firing of the wheat paddocks, whereby many acres of golden grain had been destroyed had aroused widespread indignation throughout the Commonwealth. Meetings of Anti-German Leagues were held nightly; scathing articles appeared in the press, demanding immediate and drastic action against all enemy subjects.

Those at the head of affairs could not be accused of becoming excited, or acting hastily in the matter. Weeks went by, and as far as the public was aware, little had been accomplished. True, a number of Germans, so 'twas said, had been interned, but the hiding place of those who had used "Apsley" as their headquarters had not been discovered.

Nerve-wracked from her trying experiences, Sheila Goulder had, acting upon medical advice, left Yedden, under the watchful eye of Mrs. Bryan Osmond. Jack Gordon, too, after the shearing was over, and the business of the station had resumed the normal, did not linger. Had he wished, he could not have stayed longer; for, on the very day of the cut-out he had received a notification naming the day when he must rejoin his regiment in France.

With a feeling of sadness, Jack said farewell to the

old place, wondering if ever he should see it again. He fervently hoped that he would, for it was to be his future home, if he came through safely; and its fair mistress would be his lifelong companion. Meanwhile the destinies of Yedden would be guided by Bryan Osmond and his good wife.

A short spell near the sea-side restored Sheila to something like her old self, and she and her companion came to the city and took up their abode at the Hotel Allies, there to prepare for a momentous event that was arranged for the near future. Jack was also in the city preparing for the self-same event, for before he took ship for England and the firing-line he was to bestow on fatherless Sheila the protection of his name. He had hesitated to press the matter, feeling that it would hardly be fair to Sheila to marry and leave her perhaps never to return. It might, perhaps, be better to leave her free. But the girl thought otherwise, and impatient at his delay, had settled the matter. To his promised bride he could devote but little time. In their investigations of happenings in which he was concerned, the authorities kept him busy, but it was certain that no finality would be reached ere Jack sailed.

He had booked his passage in the *Shelford*, being fortunate in securing a berth, for there were many applicants, and the date of the wedding was also the date of departure. Early on Saturday morning he would be married. A few hours later he would be at sea.

In her heart Sheila cursed the war most fervently,

giving special attention to the Kaiser and all his subjects. She would never dream of advising her lover to fail to respond to the call of duty, but she naturally thought it hard that he was to be torn from her as soon as he was really hers. She wished that by some means they could be transported to another sphere where war was unknown, so that peace and happiness might indeed be theirs.

On the eve of her wedding day she sat with her ever-present companion, Lucy Osmond, in the midst of some old schoolmates who had found her out. In their company she was beginning to forget for a brief moment her troubles, to forget about the unknown future, and dwell only in the happy present.

A fire was blazing fiercely down towards the Quay. Fire engines were dashing madly by the front of the hotel, but Sheila heeded them not, little dreaming that those enemies who had deprived her of a father, were also responsible for this burning wool store.

As she sat at the piano strumming an accompaniment to a song one of her girl friends was singing, a letter was brought to her. One glance at the handwriting on the envelope and her heart seemed to stop beating, to resume in a moment with rapid thumps that she could plainly hear. It was the writing of her father, she would know it among a thousand specimens of caligraphy. Her father, for whose death she was wearing black! What could it mean?

Excusing herself, she hurriedly sought the privacy of her room, and there with trembling hands she opened the missive and read:—

33 Knatchbull St., City.

My dearest daughter,—You mourn me as dead, but I am still alive, and long to see you. Afraid of the threatened disclosures by my enemy, Carl Presch, I fled from Yedden to hide here in Sydney. Now I think the danger is past, Presch is himself a fugitive, and I need fear him no longer. Come and see me at the above address, so that I may know what to do. Come quickly, and alone.— Your father,

MERVYN GOULDER.

There could be no mistake. The writing, so familiar to her, was his. Her dear father lived and she must go to him at once. Had Jack been handy, she would of course have confided in him, but he was out of town on that wretched German business, and there was no one else to whom she could tell her troubles. In her agitation she forgot all about her friends waiting her return, but rushed to the lift, and so down to the ground floor.

As she descended the steps leading to the street a man muffled in a motor coat accosted her. "Miss Goulder?" he queried.

"Yes?" she faltered.

"I brought that note," he said, "and waited to see if you would come. I have a car here, please get in."

Doubting slightly now, Sheila hesitated for a moment, but only for a moment.

"Very well," she said, "and please hurry."

The man did not delay. Very quickly his car was moving, and after a short run it pulled up before a shabby, uninviting house, in a narrow thoroughfare.

Sheila stepped out, and regarded the place with a shudder of dread. "No. 33, Miss," said the driver. "I'll wait."

In response to her timid knock the door at once opened.

"Come in," said a woman's voice. "He's expecting you."

In the darkness of a back room a man rose to meet her. A big bearded man who was not her father. She shrank back in terror, for in spite of the change in his appearance, she realised who it was.

"Presch!" she gasped.

"Am I so easily recognised?" laughed the man. "I thought my disguise perfect."

"I know you, you devil," she panted, retreating from his advance. "Do not touch me; let me go from this house. The car is waiting; I will call for help."

In answer to her demands, Carl seized her roughly and placed a hand over her mouth. "Yes, the car is waiting," he sneered, "but not for you, my dear. The driver is Fritz Heiden, and he waits for me, for I will leave you for a while. I have provided a most respectable chaperon, with whom you will stop for the present. You may call or scream, but screams are of no account in this locality."

He held her tightly and stood listening attentively. Someone had knocked at the door and whistled softly.

"In here," whispered the woman, opening a door leading from the room. Presch forced Sheila through the doorway, and the woman at his bidding tied a handkerchief securely over her mouth; then grasping

her by the arms, relieved Carl of his prisoner. "Keep her quiet while I see who it is," hissed Presch. "I suppose its Fritz becoming impatient."

He went out, closing the door after him, and presently Sheila heard voices plainly in the room that they had just left.

"What brings you here to-night?" she heard Carl say harshly.

"We went aboard to-day," a voice replied. "Fifteen hundred of us, less one, now that I have left them."

"And the job you had to do?"

"I put it over all right, but the game's up, Count, they've found out who I am."

"Found you out, Doctor?"

"Yes, but a bit too late; I'll beat them yet. Hean was getting dangerous with his cursed foolery, posing as a returned officer in my old uniform. Threats and warnings had no effect, so he had to go. The woman blabbed; she knew too much, more than I thought. They've been after me to-day, but I've slipped them up again."

"You got the box aboard though," said Carl.

"I did that," returned the other. "Heiden's toy is snugly tucked away below in the kit bag of Private Hean. She's timed for midnight, when I expect the good ship *Leura* will be somewhere down near the heads. This old town will get the shock of its life to-night when that bomb goes off and blows the *Leura* to bits."

The helpless girl shuddered as she listened; then

she struggled madly, but Tessa held her tightly.

"You hear that," she chuckled, grinning hideously. "All those pretty soldiers to be blown up. Ach! that will be a good one for my country."

Gagged as she was, poor Sheila could not reply. "Good business," she heard Presch say. "It should make up for our failure at the bridge. But how did you get away?"

"It was not hard," said his companion. "I slipped ashore in the excitement of the leave-taking as the ship drew away from the wharf. I had planned everything beforehand, and with a friend not far from the wharf, a bag had been left in which was the suit that you now see me in. I got there safely and changed, lay low till well after dark, then made for here. Tessa will look after me till the present danger passes."

"Tessa sails to-morrow in charge of another lady, my future wife."

"The devil! This is new to me. Who is the lady?"

"She is here now. Miss Sheila Goulder, allow me."

The door was opened and the light shone in on Sheila and her guardian. The girl stood defiantly facing Carl and the man she did not know. A clean-shaven dark man about her own height, who bowed smilingly. "Delighted to make the acquaintance of so remarkable a young lady," said the stranger. "I have, of course, heard and read of her and her friend, Lieutenant Gordon, with whom I have had some dealings."

Carl stepped to Sheila's side and smilingly removed

the handkerchief from her face. "Let her go, Tessa," he said; "that gag hides her pretty mouth, and I don't think it matters much now if she calls out. You see, comrade, the lady does not take kindly to me as a lover, but all that will be altered. Eh, little girl?"

"Do not speak to me," gasped Sheila, "I loathe you. I heard all that was said by your friend here. You have planned another outrage. Take care that it does not miscarry, as did the last."

Presch laughed again. "We had to thank you for that, my dear, but this time we have you safe. You are powerless to save the *Leura*."

Sheila did not speak again. She realised the truth of what her persecutor had said, and turned away in despair.

"Look after her, Tessa," ordered Carl. "Mrs. Schmidt will be here to help you. My friend and I will go to Fritz Heiden's flat. From there the whole harbour can be seen, and I expect a sight worth seeing late to-night. We will return. Fritz will be tired of waiting."

The two men withdrew, and as they did another woman entered, a tall, gaunt, masculine creature, who glared at Sheila as if she resented the presence of beauty amidst such ugliness.

Sheila heeded her not. One more or less did not matter. "Who is that other man?" she asked Tessa. "That brute who talks so calmly of wholesale murder."

Tessa laughed. "A brave Australian soldier," she said. "Dey calls him Brivate Hean."

CHAPTER XIX.

PRIVATE HEAN.

IN their efforts to bring to justice the gang of Huns who had been responsible for the recent series of outrages, those investigating had naturally enlisted the services of Jack Gordon. The young soldier, eager as he was to see these scoundrels placed where they could do no further harm, begrudged the time expected of him. For when a man is to be married to the sweetest girl on earth, only to part from his bride almost immediately, it follows that he wants to be with her all he can. That was Jack's position, but regarding it as part of his duty to assist the authorities in their enquiries, he had to do their bidding.

Dyson Day, an officer in the secret service branch of the Home Defence Department, was busily engaged in the case, and Gordon worked with him, but so far they had made but little progress.

To-day was Jack's last day, for on the morrow he was to take ship once more, bound for the battlefields of France. The morning was spent in a fruitless investigation at the German Concentration Camp, Day trying in vain to extract some needed information from a couple of recently-arrived prisoners. While lunching with the Camp Commandant, a 'phone message came for Day, and after receiving it he rejoined his companions plainly displeased.

"Back to town as quick as we can, Jack," he growled. "Some damned fellow masquerading as a returned wounded soldier has been found shot, and I'm to make some enquiries. I don't know why they can't give someone else a show, and let me confine myself to the work I have in hand. But it's no use growling, I suppose. Come on, Jack, we'll up kellick and get back."

Within an hour they were at the barracks, Jack waiting for his companion to interview his chief. He was not kept long, for Day joined him quickly.

"Promises to be interesting," said Day. "I've to go to a house at Clifton and interview a woman, the wife of a man who has seemingly been murdered. You'd better come, for the dead man is a German, and some light might be thrown on those other affairs."

Though smarting to get away, Jack consented, and entering a taxi they made for the Quay to take boat to Clifton. "We'll look in at the morgue and see this chap," said Day. "You might know him."

On a slab in the house of the dead a man lay dressed in a khaki uniform. A shortish, slight fellow, unmistakably a German. Gordon shook his head as he regarded the body. "A captain's uniform," he commented. "I wonder who he is; I don't know him."

"Nor I," said Day. "He pinched that uniform I suppose. He's been working the returned wounded game you know. I've to try and find out all about him from his wife. She's identified him, but that's all; have to put the third degree on her I suppose. Come on, Jack, let's get over the water."

They were lucky in catching a boat on the point of departure. Half-an-hour's run landed them at Clifton, and following instructions he had received, Day led the way to a large red-roofed cottage nestling in the bush not far from the water front. "The owner is away," he explained. "Our woman is caretaker; decent woman, the chief said. Hard luck to be married to a German waster."

"I suppose she'll exercise a wife's privilege and say nothing," said Jack.

"Might not let us in at all," laughed Day. "She wouldn't tell them much at headquarters, so I don't fancy *my* chance."

There were no obstacles placed in their way, however. A clean elderly woman opened the door, and without exhibiting any surprise admitted them. "You wish to see my daughter," she said. "She will be in at once, and will tell you what she can."

A pale-faced young woman entered and regarded them nervously. "They sent you after me," she muttered. "What do you want?"

"Tell them everything, Jenny," advised the mother. "It will be best; you promised me, you know. You see," she explained to Day, "she was afraid to speak for fear of what might come after, but I have told her that she will be protected, and her husband's countrymen cannot harm her."

"That's so," said Day. "She has nothing to fear, I'll guarantee that."

"My husband's name was Harry Heine. We did not live happily together," said the woman launching into

her story without further protest. "In fact we never lived together regularly. He only bothered about me when I was earning good money, then he'd turn up and sponge on me. Mother got the job of caretaker here and I came to help her. My husband had been away for a long time, and I was hoping he would never return, when a few weeks ago he turned up in the uniform of a soldier—an Australian soldier, and him a German. He'd enlisted in Melbourne, and finding out where I was, he somehow managed to get transferred to Sydney and was sent out to Casula. The very first night he managed to break camp and came down here to me. When he saw how comfortable everything was he swore that he would not go back. He said I'd have to keep him, hide him till they got tired of looking for him. I was afraid and could do nothing, and mother was away, so he stopped."

"He meant to desert," ventured Day.

"Yes," she went on. "That was his idea. He made himself comfortable, drank whisky that he found in the pantry, smoked the boss's cigars, read a German paper to me that he had with him, and carried on frightfully, for though he was my husband he was a brute. He went to sleep at last on a couch in the dining room, and I felt tempted to ring up the police and give him up, but some noise outside took my attention from him. I went out into the kitchen and opened the back door. It was very late, past midnight, and I was scared to see a man in the yard. He was in the light and I could see that he was a soldier, and his uniform was all wet. 'What do you want?' I asked.

"‘I’ve had a swim,’ he said. ‘Fell overboard from the ferry; I’m wet and cold. If I could only get a change I’d go home, and return it in the morning.’

"I was a bit afraid, but I pitied the man, so I invited him in. I left him in the kitchen, telling him to wait, and I would get some dry clothes. As I passed through the room where my husband was, he woke up. I looked back. He got up and lurched out to the kitchen where he had left the whisky. Terrified I followed, wondering what would happen when he saw that stranger there."

"What night was this?" asked Jack. He was all attention now, for he remembered a night when he and another had had a swim. Could it be——

"Please do not interrupt," pleaded the woman. "I have not the date. It was a dark foggy night. Where was I—Oh, I followed and listened as my husband entered the kitchen. The strange man was reading the German paper, and my husband got a start when he saw the uniform. ‘Hello!’ he said, ‘are you after me?’

"‘No!’ said the other man, ‘I’m trying to get dry. I’ve had an accident; is this your paper?’

"‘What’s that to you? You can’t read it anyhow,’ said my husband.

"‘Oh, yes, I can,’ I was surprised to hear the other say. ‘You’re not the only German in khaki.’

"‘Are you a German?’ asked my husband, and then they talked in German, and I do not know what they were saying, but soon my husband went back to English, for he was more used to that. ‘I was a soldier,’

he said, 'but I've chucked it; I won't fight for any country but Germany.'

" 'You've deserted?' said the stranger.

" 'That's so,' said Heine. 'What are you going to do about it?'

" 'The man laughed. 'Nothing,' he said. 'I've been fighting for my country in the ranks of the enemy, but I have been found out. I'm a wanted man, you can help me.'

" 'What can I do?' asked Heine.

" 'You have your uniform here?'

" 'Yes,' he said, 'what about it?'

" 'Suppose I took off this beard, could I pass for you, in your uniform?'

" 'I see your drift,' said Heine. 'You ought to easily. I was only in camp here for a day. You can try it. You'll be fined and perhaps locked up for breaking camp.'

" 'I'll chance more than that to get there. Where's your uniform and a razor.'

" 'That's how they fixed it up. My husband told me that he was lending a man his dry uniform in exchange for the wet one, and that he was going to stay there for the night. They did not know that I had listened to everything, and knew that in the early morning the bearded man that I had let into my kitchen, went away with a clean face in my husband's uniform to report himself as Private Harry Hean, No. 5492 of the 13th Reinforcements of the 2nd Battalion.'

" 'And his real name?'" asked Day.

" 'Wilhelm Schell, otherwise Capt. Shelley, A.M.C.,"

cried Jack. "The dog got ashore after all that night, and back into the ranks."

"But we'll get him now," declared Day, rising excitedly. "Queer, ain't it, that we'd get on the track like this. We've no time to lose; a lot of men went aboard to-day, our man might have been amongst them——"

"Easy, Day!" interrupted Jack. "Let Mrs. Heine finish her story first."

"I'm sorry—er—I beg your pardon," cried Day. "Please go on, madam."

The woman, whose face showed her annoyance at the interruption, continued:—

"Yes, as this gentleman says, the man's name was Dr. Schell. He took my husband's name and place in the ranks, and escaped detection. Heine stopped here for a little while, drinking all the spirits he could lay hands on. Then he got a notion to impose on people by making out that he was a returned soldier. He dressed up in Schell's uniform and went away, and by some means induced several people to give him a good time in their homes. He came here last week, being short of money, and then he told me that Schell had got to hear of his carryings on, and had threatened to kill him if he persisted in going about and talking as he was doing. You see, Schell was afraid that Heine might, in a drunken moment, tell someone the truth. He has carried out his threat and killed my husband."

"You think that Schell shot Heine?" asked Day.

"There is no doubt whatever," returned Mrs. Heine.

"My husband was murdered by the man who had taken his name, or some one in his employ. That is all, sir. I have told you all I know, and I hope that I will not have to suffer for it."

"Have no fear, madam," said Day, rising. "You will have every protection that the law can give; you will not be molested, I assure you. We will have the bogus Private Hean arrested without delay."

"There's a 'phone here. Why not ring up Casula?" suggested Jack. "Find out if the 13th of the 2nd went aboard the transport to-day."

After much delay Dyson Day raised the Camp. The 13th of the 2nd had gone aboard, and the *Leura* was now lying in the stream."

"We'll have to hurry," cried Day. "Get a move on, Jack; we'll board the *Leura* and give Dr. Schell, otherwise Private Heine, a shock."

But it was they who got the shock. A rush back to town, a motor launch from Man-o'-war Steps out to the *Leura*, and the chilling news:—

"Out of all the men shipped that morning there was but one deserter—Private Harry Hean, No. 5492, 13th of the 2nd."

Dejected, they made their way back to the shore. It was dark when they landed, and Jack heaved a sigh of relief, for he would now be free to hurry to Sheila, and have at least a couple of hours with her for their last night together. He rushed to the nearest telephone to announce his coming. Mrs. Osmond answered, but he impatiently demanded Sheila.

"Come at once, Jack," said a tearful voice. "I want you badly. Sheila cannot be found."

CHAPTER XX.

SHANGHAIED.

A LONE with those two repulsive specimens of her sex, Sheila tried to think what was best for her to do. She had half a mind to tackle them and fight her way out, but they were so masculine looking; what hope would she have? Presch had said that screams for help would avail her nothing, but perhaps he was mistaken. She would test her lung power; surely someone would hear and give heed.

Throwing her head back, Sheila emitted a series of screams such as she had not known she was capable of giving voice to.

"Ach! Shut up, you cat," snapped Mrs. Schmidt, and the two women sprang upon her and shook her roughly. "Stop it, I say. That noise is no goot, is it? People vill think someone vos ged killed."

Sheila struggled with all her power, but they dragged her from the room and up a narrow flight of stairs to a dingy, badly lighted bedroom.

"Here you vill stop," panted Tessa; "and you must keep quiet und not fight so much. Ven der Count comes he will quiet you."

The women laughed, but Sheila saw no humor in the prospect.

"I vill leave her to you, Tessa," said Mrs. Schmidt. "I haf something that I must do in mine own place."

"No, no," protested the smaller woman. "You must not go, she vill fight and run away from me."

The Schmidt woman laughed coarsely. "Ve vill her clothes taig," she said, "den she vill nod vant to go oud I think, eh?"

"You vill undress und to bed go," ordered Tessa.

Sheila shook her head. "I will not," she said. "You must let me go. You have no right to keep me here."

Once more they seized her, and despite her desperate resistance, threw her on the bed and tore her clothes off. Everything that she wore, except the scantiest of undergarments and her stockings, was taken from her, and for shame's sake she sought the protection of the uninviting bedclothes amidst the laughter of the hags.

"I vill these taig," chuckled Mrs. Schmidt, gathering up the things. "Now I leave you, Tessa; you vill alride be till the Count returns. I haf vork to do in my house, und you can call if I am wanted."

The cowering girl shuddered at the mention of Presch's expected return, and registered a mental vow that he would not see her as she was now—alive. She watched the angular Mrs. Schmidt depart, after assuring her friend that "there vas nodings to fear from the cat now that her clothes were gone."

Seemingly Tessa had her doubts on the subject, for she mumbled reproaches at the other woman for leaving her alone with her prisoner.

Sheila lay quiet watching Tessa. Evidently the room was the lady's boudoir, for she unlocked a drawer and produced a small revolver which she placed on the dressing table, and a bottle from which she proceeded to partake of some stimulating refreshment.

In a corner of the room, close to the head of the bed, Sheila saw a stout walking stick standing. What it was doing there did not concern her. It was a weapon, and she was desperate. At any moment those brutes might return, and then—— The thought was nauseating. She had never in her life struck a blow at a fellow creature, but she must do it now in no half-hearted manner. It was a matter of more than life and death to her. Grasping the stick firmly, she sprang up and rushed upon her guardian. She did not mince matters, and the blow that descended on that dishonoured head would have felled a bullock. Tessa dropped without a moan, and lay still. The girl gave a gasp of horror when she saw the woman stretched at her feet, but there was no time to lose. Pulling herself together, she took the little weapon that lay on the table and crept from the room. At the bottom of the stairs she paused irresolute. Having done so much, what next? Clothed as she was, almost in the garb of Mother Eve, how could she venture from the house; but if Presch and that other man should come! That was the thought that spurred her to action.

She entered the room in which she had first met the Count. There was nothing there to help her. She must return upstairs and drag the clothes from the woman she had stunned, perhaps killed. Her stocking-foot struck something as she turned, it was the bag that other man had brought with him. Curiosity prompted her to place it on a chair and open it. The sight of its contents caused her heart to jump. Here was a gleam of hope. A khaki uniform lay in the bag. Coat, pants, leggings, boots and cap. These

would cover her nakedness, and help her to escape. She drew the things out and a money belt dropped to the floor, she picked it up and placed it with the suit on a chair. She listened for a moment, all was still and quiet in the house. It was now or never. Quickly she donned the uniform and placed the belt around her slim waist. Fortunately its owner had not been a big man, and Sheila filled his clothes admirably, though the boots were big and heavy.

If she could only have seen herself then, as she placed the cap upon her head, she would not have been ashamed of her appearance, for she made a bonnie soldier, indeed. Again she paused to listen before leaving the house, and as she did, the words of that strange man came back to her and turned her cold.

"Heiden's toy is snugly tucked away below in the kit bag of Private Hean. She's timed for midnight."

The troopship was to be blown up, and she alone could save it; but how? Could she be taken aboard the ship and warn them of the danger? For all she knew the *Leura* might have left the harbour, and nothing could save her from destruction. It seemed to her that the midnight hour must have long since passed, but she must try and do something. Hesitating no longer, she opened the front door and crept out. No one was in the dismal street, and keeping in the shadows she hurried onward, quite ignorant of her whereabouts. As she went along she felt the pouches of the money belt, and found some notes and silver there. That was good, for she might want some money presently.

A few minutes' walk brought her to the corner of a main street, through which the trams were rattling. It could not be so late after all, she might yet be in time. A single taxi stood at the corner, its driver lolling lazily on his seat. Sheila paused and asked him the time in as masculine a voice as she could manage to assume.

"Close up to eleven," he yawned. "What's up? Stopped out too late?"

"I'm in a fix," said Sheila. "Ought to be aboard the *Leura*, she's out in the stream. I'll be posted as a deserter. Can you drive me to where I can get a boat to take me out? I'll pay anything you like."

The taxi man chuckled. "You blokes can't keep away from this part of the town," he said. "You'll miss y'r trip, son, I'm thinking. Anyway, hop in, I know a bloke might take the job on, I'll try him for you."

Sheila entered the cab and was whisked away towards the waterside. The boatman that they aroused scouted the idea. He said that no one was allowed within coo-ee of a troopship; then at the sight of money in the soldier boy's hand he considered it might be attempted. Two pounds in advance decided him, and Sheila stepped aboard his skiff, the taxi-driver shaking her hand heartily, and refusing any payment for his part of the business.

Out on to the dark waters of the harbour they went. Sheila suffering no pangs of conscience for having used that traitor's notes in her attempt to spoil his devilish work. The excitement of her adventure

even kept her from thinking of Jack and the prospect of marrying him in the morning.

The S.S. *Leura* had not left her moorings, but they could hear shouts and cheers, which Sheila took to indicate that her time was near. The boatman plied his oars willingly, and soon drew near the big ship. The boys aboard were singing lustily and shouting farewells to passing ferry boats as they saluted with discordant cock-a-doodles on their sirens. The waterman grew nervous as he neared the ship. "You won't get aboard, son," he said. "No hope in life. They'll hunt me away."

"Try, take any risk," urged Sheila. "Don't turn back now, I've more money. I must get aboard; I'll give you every penny."

"No you won't," he growled. "I can do with all I get, but I ain't takin' any more er yours, youngster. I dunno what they lets kids like you go to fight fer. Why yer more like er girl than a man, blow me if y' ain't."

Sheila trembled as he spoke. She would soon be recognised for what she was, evidently. Never mind, what did that matter as long as she succeeded in her mission? She did not answer the boatman, only urging him onward. He had a wholesome dread of military regulations, but he took the risk, and pulled right up to the ship's side, only to be ordered off by an alert sentry.

"Soldier wants to come aboard," he shouted. "Got left behind this morning." The sentry's reply was drowned by cheers from the men who lined the rail. "Along here, matey," they shouted. "We'll lower a

rope and hand him up. Quick and lively now, before you're stopped."

The rope came down the side right enough, and Sheila with beating heart grasped it, and hanging on was pulled up the ship's side.

"You'll be court-martialled and shot, an' so'll I," were the last words she heard the boatman say, as he pulled away into the night. But Sheila as she fell into the arms of a mob of cheering soldiers, did not agree with him. She knew that she was in no danger of being court-martialled, but what she heard at the moment that her feet touched the deck gave her grave concern. The ship's powerful siren roared as if her arrival had been awaited.

"We're off!" a thousand voices roared the words, and then broke into a chorus of farewell. Sheila was forgotten in the excitement of the moment. As she rushed along the deck she felt the ship move in answer to the whirl of the propellers. From all around came the blasts of whistles, cock-a-doodling the last good-bye, and the soldiers' hoarse voices coo-eed and cheered in turn.

The *Leura* was outward bound, and she was going with her. Surely they would stop the ship and let her go ashore again as soon as she had delivered her message. She grasped the arm of a man she took to be an officer. "Take me to the—er—O.C., the commandant," she demanded, "I want ——"

"What, cold feet already kid?" laughed the man. "Buck up, crack hardy, the O.C. can't be bothered, you'll soon get used to being away from home and mother."

He passed on laughing, and Sheila felt wild enough to follow and give him a bit of her mind, but as she looked after him another soldier brushed by, and she accosted him. This one had three stripes on his arm, and a smiling face that made her believe that he would listen. "I want to see the commandant, please," she said. "Can you help me, it is urgent."

He dragged her to a better lighted spot and looked at her pale face. "Were you the chap they pulled aboard just now," he asked. "There'll be a fine row over that. What's the strength of it? Who are you?"

"Private Hean, 13th of the 2nd," answered Sheila.

"Hean!" he exclaimed frowning. "Why that's the fellow that deserted. They came aboard looking for him this afternoon. He's wanted for murder. Come with me and see the officer of the watch; he'll get you the O.C. If you're Hean, I don't like your chance."

In the presence of the commander at last, Sheila felt her knees giving, and a fainting sensation came over her. Realising that she was on the verge of a break-down, she came to the point at once.

"I am not a soldier," she said, speaking quickly. "This uniform was worn by a man calling himself Private Hean, who is now a deserter. He placed a bomb aboard this ship to-day. An infernal machine or something. It is in his kit bag, and is timed to explode at about midnight. You must have it found at once or it will be too late."

The officer looked at her with a grave face. "What grounds have you for such an assertion?" he demanded. "It is impossible"

"Have Private Hean's bag found and brought to you," cried Sheila. "You must. I have told the truth—oh, please do not delay. Consider what it means."

"You—you are a woman," gasped the O.C. "What the ——"

She blushed a rosy red despite her agitation. "Please, please do something," she pleaded, "then I will tell you everything."

Her manner convinced him. He pressed a button to summon an orderly. In an instant another officer joined the O.C. A hurried conversation, some curious glances at the girl-soldier, and he departed.

"A search will be made instantly," said the Commandant. "If your story is true that thing will be found, if you have lied then ——" he shrugged his shoulders as if to say he would not answer for her fate. "I have sent for the captain of the ship," he continued. "He will be here presently. I want him to hear your story with me. Please sit down."

As he spoke an orderly entered with a military overcoat which he handed to the Commandant, and on his heels came the captain of the *Leura*. The O.C. handed the coat to Sheila. "It's rather chilly," he said kindly, "wrap yourself up in this."

She took the coat gratefully, while Captain Shields looked his surprise at the O.C.'s consideration for one of his privates. "Sit down, captain, my young friend here brings a startling story. We are to be blown up by a bomb secreted aboard; it sounds incredible, but I believe she has good grounds for what she says."

Captain Shields looked puzzled. "She?" he questioned.

"We are wasting time," said the Commandant, noting Sheila's expression of impatient annoyance; "let us hear your story as quickly as you can."

Sheila did not dwell in the recital. Both men were impressed, though Shields was still inclined to doubt.

The O.C. rose and paced the cabin. He could not repress the concern he felt.

"Half-past eleven," he muttered. "I wonder how they are getting on below. What will you do, captain, put back or keep on? If this thing should happen out at sea it will be terrible."

"We are outside the heads now," growled Shields. "I don't see that it matters. Surely that man's kit can be located. I'll keep on I think."

"Let us see if they have found anything," suggested the O.C., leading the way to the door. The captain stepped after him, but Sheila sprang to her feet in an agony of fear. "You must send me ashore," she insisted. "I am to be married in the morning. What I have told you is true, as true as that the same men blew up the Yibbi Bridge near my home at Yedden."

"You are Miss Goulder," exclaimed both the men in unison, pausing to gaze admiringly at her as they raised their right hands to the salute. "I am afraid that I cannot send you back now," said Captain Shields. "If this trouble passes I will find some way of getting you back, but if the worst comes, well the matter will be in the hands of a higher authority."

The men passed out leaving her alone, and for a few moments there was silence and she dropped her

head on to the table in despair. The entrance of a steward with hot coffee aroused her, and miserable as she was, she brought herself to partake of the warm drink. Alone again, she watched the cabin clock. How the minutes seemed to drag; the ship rolled and tossed incessantly, leading her to believe that a heavy sea was running. She began to think of her father, of Jack and the friends she had been entertaining when she was called away by that forged letter; of Presch, and the man whose clothes she was wearing, and Tessa, the German woman, that she had struck down. All the terrible happenings of the last few months of her life passed through her mind, and she wondered if to-night was to be the end of everything. Ten minutes to twelve, and the Commandant had not returned, the suspense was becoming awful. A brief ten minutes left to decide the fate of the ship and all aboard. She sat for half that time, clenching and unclenching her hands; then unable to remain cooped up there any longer she rose and staggered to the cabin door. As she opened it there was a sound of hurrying feet. A group of men rushed in upon her. Captain Shields, the Commandant and other officers entered, and behind them many more were crowding to the door. She felt her hands seized, and heavy hands slapped her shoulders, and outside a roar of cheers arose. The room swam around her, a sea of faces flashed before her, someone's arms caught her as she swayed. Then all was blotted out.

CHAPTER XXI.

TESSA PAYS THE PENALTY.

THE abrupt departure of the hostess from the midst of her young guests had caused a surprise that was but momentary. The girls attributed Sheila's action to an eccentricity of a young lady on the eve of her wedding day, and continued to entertain themselves. Mrs. Osmond, however, was troubled; she wondered what that letter was that had taken her away so suddenly without an explanation, and as the minutes passed she grew uneasy at her prolonged absence.

"I will go and see what is detaining Sheila," she said at last, rising and hurrying from the room. She was not long away, and when she returned her face was pale and she was trembling.

"Miss Goulder has gone out," she said. "I can't understand it, but she is sure to return quickly, for Lieutenant Gordon is expected at any moment now."

The girls did not take the matter seriously, they laughed and chatted gaily as they prepared to go, promising to be at the church in the morning to give Sheila a "good blowing up" for leaving them as she did.

Left alone, Mrs. Osmond racked her brain for some explanation of Sheila's action, but could find none. Descending to the ground floor, she ascertained from the hall porter that a letter had been handed in for Miss Goulder by a man of whose appearance he had not taken the slightest notice, and he had sent it up by the lift attendant. The lift man remembered Sheila coming down, but no one seemed to notice what she had done after she had left the lift. A telephone call raised Mrs. Osmond's hopes for a moment, but it was from Jack Gordon, and she had to tell him that Sheila was not with her. She could do nothing now but await his coming. No doubt he would blame her, but he must recognise that she was powerless in the matter.

Gordon arrived post haste, his face betraying the concern he felt at the occurrence, but he did not reproach Mrs. Osmond.

"Any news?" he asked.

She shook her head gloomily. "None," she answered. "She has been gone about an hour now; no doubt she'll be back directly."

"I don't think so," said Jack. "She has been lured away by some faked message. I see the hand of my Hun friends in this. I should not have left her to-day at all."

"I am sure I tried to be with her always," began Mrs. Osmond, beginning to cry, "I ——"

"You have been a good friend," said Jack, placing a hand on her shoulder. "Don't you worry, Dyson Day will be here shortly. He has an important job for

to-night trying to trace the deserter, we'll work together and try and find Sheila at the same time."

Dyson Day joined Jack after he had made his report of the day's work at head-quarters. Without thought of dining they discussed together the happenings of the day. The secret service officer was inclined to couple the desertion of the so-called Private Hean with the disappearance of Sheila. Jack, while blaming the Germans associated with Carl Presch for the strange absence of his promised bride, did not agree that Heine, or to give the man his correct name—Wilhelm Schell, was concerned in it.

"Well, time will tell," said Day. "When we find one of them, I'll be surprised if we do not at least hear something of the other."

All through the night they worked together, dodging here, there and everywhere in the city, but no discoveries did they make. The morning dawned, and Sheila was still missing and the fate of the deserter had not been ascertained. It was a hopeless dawn for Jack, as tired and weary he sat with Dyson Day making a pretence of breakfasting.

His wedding day! The day he must sail to rejoin his regiment! What was he to do? Could he go and leave the girl he loved to the mercy of the scoundrels into whose hands he was sure she had fallen. His heart told him that it was impossible, but his sense of honour said that he could not neglect the call of duty. If he let the S.S. *Shelford* go without him it was impossible to say when he could secure another ship, for passages were being snapped up greedily.

The *Shelford* would, barring accidents, give him just time to report himself on the date selected for his return, and missing her might mean being classed as a deserter. He was up against a stiff problem indeed.

The morning hours went by without any relief. No word of the missing girl in any quarter. Very soon his decision would have to be made.

Unable to decide for himself, he put it before Dyson Day, and from that rigid disciplinarian he went to higher authorities for advice, finally facing the military commandant himself.

The high official was sympathetic, but advised Jack to go in the *Shelford*.

"I cannot extend your leave," he said. "You do not belong to Australia, you know, Gordon. Your case is a hard one, but I am sure all will be well. By the time you reach Melbourne, no doubt we will be able to tell you that Miss Goulder is safe and sound."

There was no hope for it. He would have to go, and he made his preparations accordingly. Mrs. Osmond and Dyson Day swore that they would leave no stone unturned to find Sheila and guard her from further harm, and with this he had to be content. Right up to the very last minute that he dared to linger he hoped for some news, but nothing came to ease his mind.

* * * * *

From the window of Fritz Heiden's elevated flat the three Germans looked out over the harbour. They could see the troopship *Leura* moored out in the stream, and they were anxious for midnight to come

before she slipped from her buoy to commence her journey. They wanted to see the result of the high-power explosive contained in the bomb that Schell, in the guise of Private Hean, had placed aboard. Heiden had been responsible for its manufacture, and he assured his comrades that it would respond to the clockwork regulator that he had attached, and the result from their view-point would be grand.

"I will be surprised if anyone lives to realise what struck them," he said, and the others hoped that he spoke the truth.

They were doomed to disappointment, however. Shortly after eleven they noticed the ship move, and heard the blasts of the many whistles as she headed down the harbour.

"She'll be well outside the heads before twelve," growled Fritz, "we won't see the fun after all. Perhaps it is just as well, they'll have no hope of escape out at sea."

"It's no use watching any longer," said Presch. "I'll get away up to Tessa's place and see how my bride-to-be is taking her gruel."

"I am going there," exclaimed Schell. "I must hide for a day or two. They'll be searching the whole town for me."

"You'd better stop where you are to-night," advised Presch; "it will be safer; to-morrow night Tessa's place will be without a tenant. You can get Mrs. Schmidt to go there and look after you."

"It would be better if you did not bother about that girl," growled Heiden. "She'll cause trouble I am

sure. It's a mad notion of yours to go away with her."

"I go to serve the Fatherland elsewhere," said Carl haughtily. "That girl shall go with me, with Tessa as her companion. It is too late now, and I have gone too far to alter my plans, did I wish. I will see you both in the morning."

He left them, his eyes blazing fiercely, and Fritz regretted that he had spoken, for he feared the Count's anger. Presch walked briskly along till he came to the sordid thoroughfare known as Knatchbull Street. He entered the gate of No. 33, and tapped softly at the door, whistling gently at the same time. There was no response. He repeated the signal, but all was quiet within. Wondering, he placed a hand upon the door knob. To his surprise the door gave to the pressure. He pushed it open and entered and closed it behind him.

His heart was filled with a strange dread. What did the open door mean? Had those women bungled? Surely they had not allowed their prisoner to escape. He moved stealthily along the hall. The light still burned in the room where he had left the women, but there was no one there now. As he reached the foot of the stairs a moaning woman shuffled down towards him. It was Tessa, and as she moaned she held a hand to her head.

"What is it?" he snarled. "Where is Mrs. Schmidt? Where is the girl?"

"She has gone," groaned Tessa, and he took her by the throat and dragged her into the room. "Gone!"

he hissed. "Who? Mrs. Schmidt or the girl?"

"The girl," muttered the woman. "Oh, do not kill me. It vos not der fault of mine. Mrs. Schmidt she leave me, und dot girl she stun me mid der stick I keep, und I know nodings till this minute."

"Gone!" gasped Presch. "By God, you'll answer for this." He shook her brutally.

"How long ago?" he demanded. "Come, speak up or I'll kill you."

"I do nod know, I vos stun I say. I fall down. She vos run oud naked."

"Naked?"

"Mid nodings on, nearly," whimpered Tessa. "Ve her clothes taig off, und Mrs. Schmidt she taig dem to her house till der morning. I do nod know any more."

Presch looked around helplessly. "Gone out without clothes," he muttered. "Impossible! You hag, you are lying!"

"Led me go. I tells der truth," she returned, trying to force his hands from her throat, digging her nails into them in her terror. He did not release her. In his blind anger his grip tightened, he drew back a hand and with his clenched hand struck the distorted old face. Then with an oath he threw her from him and she lay still. A man's hand-bag stood on a chair close by. It was the one that Schell had brought with him. Picking it up, Carl turned out the gas and hurried from the place.

Heiden and Schell were trying to snatch a little sleep when his return startled them into life again. "What brings you back?" demanded Fritz. "Could you not manage her?"

"She's gone—escaped!" he whispered, "and I think I've killed old Tessa."

The two men were on their feet instantly. "God!" gasped Schell, "now we're up against it with a vengeance. Why in hell's name didn't you take Fritz's advice and leave the girl alone."

"I knew she'd cause trouble," groaned Heiden. "She'll have the police up at Tessa's by this. We dare not venture near there now."

"No," agreed Presch. "I brought Schell's bag so that they would not find it there. I cannot understand how she got away. Tessa says she had no clothes. Mrs. Schmidt had them locked up in her place."

Schell had taken possession of the bag. "A good job you brought this," he said, then as he regarded it he frowned. "It's light," he muttered, and placed it on a chair to open it. "Hell!" he gasped, "it's empty. If she had no clothes she found a way to get some. She's taken my uniform and got away in that."

Nonplussed, the three stared at each other in silence. Heiden was the first to regain his equanimity. "I can't stop here in suspense," he exclaimed, rising and seizing his cap. "I will go out and try and discover what is going on. You two lay low till I return; I think you are safe here."

They did not seek to comment upon his proposal, and without further words he left them. They had no inclination to converse and each occupied with his own thoughts, they anxiously waited through the silent hours.

CHAPTER XXII.

TRANSHIPPED.

SHEILA opened her eyes and gazed around in an effort to think coherently. She felt as if she had awakened from some remarkable dream, but the tossing and plunging of the ship told her that it was not dreamland that she had been roaming in.

Wrapped in blankets that were cosy indeed, she was reclining on a bunk in a large, well-furnished cabin. Her boots and leggings had been removed, but she was relieved to find that otherwise she was fully dressed.

What had happened? Had they found that bomb and prevented its explosion, or had the whole thing been a false alarm; and most important of all: Where was she being carried to?

She must get up, and insist upon being put ashore at once. Having resolved on that she sat up, to discover that she was not alone, as she had imagined. A tall, young officer stood a few feet away, gazing smilingly at her.

"Good morning," he laughed. "How do you feel now?" Sheila blushed, and felt inclined to hide

her head under the blankets, but she tried to face the situation boldly.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "And why am I here?"

The young man smiled again. "I am a doctor," he said, "and you are here, because—well, you know why you came aboard, don't you?"

"Yes, but here in this cabin, I mean," she insisted.

"Because it is the best available," he said. "It is the Captain's."

"I did not want him to give up his room for me," pouted Sheila, "I wanted to be put ashore. What time is it?"

"Eight o'clock, on Saturday morning."

"Eight!" she cried, incredulously, "and have we been travelling all the time?"

"We have, and pretty fast at that. You fainted, you know, and little wonder. They sent for me and I brought you round, and seeing that you were inclined to be nervy, I gave you something to soothe, and make you sleep. It's been a rough, dirty night, but you never woke. The rest has done you good."

"Travelling all night," she almost groaned as she said it. "Wherever are we?"

"About one hundred and fifty miles from Sydney, I should say," replied the Doctor, "but excuse me, please, I have to tell the O.C. when you are awake. He'll be in to see you at once."

He left the room, and as he closed the door behind him, Sheila sprang up, and quickly donning her boots and leggings, made a wild effort to arrange her

disordered hair. In the midst of her confusion the Commandant knocked and entered.

"Miss Goulder," he said, gravely. "On behalf of all on board the *Leura*, I thank you. We owe our lives to you."

"Then, there was a bomb?" she cried.

"There was, indeed, and a powerful one," he said. "It was found, just a few minutes before twelve. It was stowed right beneath the engines. One of the engine-room staff had disappeared, so the chief told me, and no doubt he had helped that other scoundrel to plant it. Had it gone off, I do not think many would have survived to tell the tale."

Sheila went white at the thought of what might have happened. "I am glad now that I was seized by those wretches, as it has been the means of spoiling their plans; but why was I kept on the ship? You knew I wished to go ashore."

"What else could we do?" asked the Commandant. "You fainted when we brought that thing to show you; then you went to sleep, and the Captain gave up his cabin, and made you as comfortable as a mere man could."

"It was very kind," sighed Sheila, "but it would have been kinder to have sent me back. I am to be married at ten this morning."

The soldier could not help smiling at the girl's despair, though the situation was anything but humorous. "The groom will quickly forgive you when he learns the truth," he said.

"I may never see him again," she complained.

"He must sail to-day to rejoin his regiment in France."

"Umph," grunted the O.C., "that's a bad job for you; but a soldier, you know, must let nothing stand between him and his duty; you will meet again."

She shook her head sadly. "What are you going to do with me?" she pleaded, "I cannot stop here among all your men."

"Of course not," he answered. "We will transfer you to some other ship before many hours have passed. We have been sending out messages, and just now we received a reply. An Australian war-ship is even now hurrying to rescue you from the wild men you have fallen among. She should be sighted before long, so you had better be ready for a rough trip in one of the *Leura's* boats."

"Thank you so much," exclaimed Sheila. "I am ready now. Do you think I will be back in Sydney before the *Shelford* sails?"

The Commandant shook his head, with a smile of sympathy. "I'm afraid not," he said, kindly, "but don't worry, little girl, you should be the proudest woman alive after what you have succeeded in doing. Now I'm going to have your breakfast sent in, see that you do justice to it, for you must keep your strength up."

He withdrew, and Sheila, rebelling against having been carried out to sea, declared that she would eat no breakfast on the ship. She wrapped herself in the great coat they had given her and went on deck. A heavy sea was running, and the wind blew fiercely,

and she was glad to hang on to anything in reach for support. She wondered why it was that she felt no symptoms of seasickness, as she looked out on the never-ending succession of towering waves that stretched before her. Absorbed in admiration of the awe-inspiring spectacle, she forgot for the moment the sensation that she herself was likely to create among the lads aboard.

The news that the girl-soldier who had risked her life to save them was alone on deck soon reached the rank and file. Before she knew what was happening, Sheila was completely surrounded by cheering soldiers. They shook her hand, they cheered and cheered again. Flushed and embarrassed, she looked around for means of escape. A ship's officer forced his way to her side, and led her out from her too-ardent admirers, the boys groaning their protests at the man who was taking her away.

"The Captain wants to know if you would like to go on the bridge?" said the officer, and glad to get away from the admiring glances of those khaki-clad soldiers, she said that she certainly would.

Captain Shields greeted her cheerily. "Glad to see that you are a good sailor, Miss Goulder," he cried. "I'm sorry you can't stop with us."

"I don't see any prospect of my leaving," she exclaimed, gloomily. "I think you have made up your minds to take me right to the front."

"You've got grit enough to go," he cried, "but look over there." He pointed away out to sea, and

Sheila's heart gave a jump as she looked in the direction indicated.

"There comes your deliverer," said the Captain.

Enveloped in a cloud of black smoke, a steamer was approaching, and Sheila felt a little nervous as she watched it, one moment poised on the top of a wave, the next engulfed and almost lost to sight.

"It seems to be getting a rough time," ventured Sheila. "Is it so very rough?"

"Fairly," returned the skipper, "but it's nothing to what I'm expecting, by the look of things. We will have a bit of a job putting you aboard."

"I must go," declared the girl, looking with admiration at the little ship that was tearing through the seas towards them. "I must get back to Sydney somehow."

Nearer and nearer crept the destroyer, until the men on her deck could be plainly seen. "Be ready, Miss Goulder," advised the Captain, "you will want all your nerve for this job."

"I am ready," said Sheila.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RE-UNITED.

MORNING dawned to find Carl Presch and his companion heavy-eyed and weary from loss of sleep. It had been a wild night, and every fresh gust of wind caused them to shudder. The younger man was a bunch of nerves; every few minutes throughout the night he had peered out over the harbour in the direction of the ocean, wondering what had happened upon the troopship, from which he had deserted, until Presch impatiently ordered him to remain quiet.

"We will hear soon enough," he growled. "Let us hope that we have succeeded this time in striking a blow that will make Australia pause before sending any more troops to fight against us."

Heiden had not returned, but they were not worrying about that. Indeed, it would have occasioned Carl no surprise did he not come back, for they had not agreed too well of late. However, Fritz had no thought of deserting his comrades. Soon after sunrise, he rejoined them, and his news, though to a certain extent reassuring, was puzzling.

"She is still missing," he declared. "What do you make of it, Count?"

"Has she not returned to her hotel?" asked Carl in astonishment.

"No, she has not been seen there. All night long, Gordon, with a secret-service man, has been searching for her without result. I have kept on their track and I know that they have discovered nothing. Gordon will sail at noon to-day to rejoin his regiment, quite ignorant of the girl's whereabouts, unless something comes to light during the morning."

"What of Tessa?" questioned Schell. "Has anyone been there?"

"Not a soul," returned Heiden. "I have had the house watched, but Mrs. Schmidt will be finding out things this morning; if Tessa is dead——"

"I will leave money to keep her quiet," interposed Carl. "I cannot imagine where in Hell's name that girl has got to. I expected that she would go straight to the hotel, that a hue and cry would be raised, but to disappear like this; it's got me puzzled."

"She heard me tell you of what I had done on board the *Leura*," said Schell.

"Is it possible that she went to warn them?"

The idea made the others pause, open-eyed.

"It may be so," gasped Fritz. "She has the nerve, curse her. This comes of your madness in interfering with her, Presch. It will be our ruin. What do you propose to do?"

Presch shrugged his shoulders and snarled at Heiden. "She had no time for such an undertaking," he snapped. "The ship had gone before she

escaped. I will carry out my arrangements and sail in the *Shelford*, though I will not have the lady companion I anticipated."

"And what of us?"

"That is your own affair. You must do the best you can for yourselves."

"You will have Lieutenant Gordon for a shipmate, remember," said Schell.

"I do not care. He will not know that Mr. Charles Preston and Count Carl Presch are one and the same, if we do meet. I fancy my appearance has altered enough to disguise me from him. If I see a chance, you may be sure that Gordon will not stand in our way much longer."

* * * *

Carl was early aboard the *Shelford*. The day being so cold and stormy, he remained muffled up in a great-coat, and kept well in the background, watching from a distance everyone that came aboard. The gale that had sprung up during the night had increased in violence, and reports from South Head stated that a big sea was running outside, and that coastal steamers were not venturing out. The prospect was not pleasing to most, but the state of the weather did not trouble Carl Presch, for he was a hardened world-traveller. A large crowd had gathered on the wharf to see the *Shelford* depart, but Carl looked in vain for Jack Gordon, the enemy who was to be a shipmate on the voyage, and he wondered what would have happened had he succeeded in getting Sheila on to the same ship

as her lover. As the time went by, he began to think that the young officer would miss his trip, but at the very last minute, when the ribbons were stretched from wharf to ship, and the gangways were about to be removed, the man he was watching for broke through the crowd and rushed aboard. His appearance was the signal for an outburst of cheering, due no doubt to the uniform he wore; but Gordon seemed in no mood to acknowledge the compliment. There was no sign of Sheila, and though Carl was pleased to know that Gordon's wedding had not come off, he was puzzled indeed to account for the spiriting away of the bride. What had happened after she had struck down Tessa, and escaped from that house where he had left her? It was a question that he could not answer. Whatever it was, it had the effect of allowing him to at least depart in peace. Evidently Gordon was no wiser than himself, to judge from his worried expression, as he hung over the rail, staring eagerly at the crowd, as if hoping against hope, that a face he wanted to see might yet appear.

And Carl Presch was right. Jack knew nothing of the whereabouts of the girl to whom he should have been married that morning. Heavy of heart, he listened to the cheers of the crowd; saw the ribbons part, as the tugs plucked the big steamer away from the wharf and swung her around to commence her long journey. Friends there had been, of course, to see him off, but their cheery good wishes did not go far to compensate for the absence of the woman he loved.

Very soon, the calls and coo-ees of the crowd died away; the fluttering handkerchiefs faded from sight, as the good ship ploughed her way down the storm-tossed harbour, towards the heads and the open sea.

Some two hundred souls all told were aboard the *Shelford*, and as she met the full force of wind and wave outside the majority of the passengers hurried below to the seclusion of their cabins.

Jack watched the land fade from sight, then he too went to his cabin. He felt at that moment absolutely friendless, and a feeling of despair, such as he had never before known, obsessed him. Had he known that the worst enemy he was ever likely to have was on that self-same ship, his state of mind would no doubt have been bad indeed. The sea was rough enough in all conscience, but a falling glass warned the Captain that even worse weather was in store. But he was too old a hand to be greatly worried by that, never doubting but that he would make Melbourne very little behind time despite the conditions. For three hours or more the ship forged ahead. Very few people ventured on deck, as the warmth of the cabins and saloons was preferable, but something happened now that drew a crowd of sightseers from their retirement.

A destroyer was bearing down on the *Shelford*, and had ordered her to stop.

What could it mean? All sorts of theories were advanced, and startling rumors spread throughout the ship. The most popular was that an escaping prisoner of war was aboard the *Shelford*, and that

he had to be handed over. 'The most uncomfortable of all the souls on board at that moment was Carl Presch. His mind was full of dire forebodings, as he locked himself in his cabin, determined to put up a fight if he was called upon.

All eyes were trained on the fast-approaching destroyer, plunging her way with decks awash, towards them. Her speed seemed terrific; nearer and nearer the two ships drew. The *Shelford's* telegraph clanged, and in response the engines stopped, and she lay tossing in the trough of the waves. As close now as she dared to approach, the destroyer also hove to, and the watchers on the merchantman saw that a boat had been got ready to lower.

"It's madness. No boat can live in that sea," cried someone, and his opinion was general. Still those responsible thought otherwise, and presently the frail craft, manned by young Australian sailors, began a perilous journey towards the *Shelford*.

As it drew nearer, it could be seen that all on board were not bluejackets. One khaki-clad figure crouched amongst them, and at once the onlookers rightly guessed that in that soldier they had the solution of the undertaking.

With admirable skill and daring, the boat was manoeuvred through the treacherous waves, and guided alongside the waiting steamer. The merchant sailors were ready to do their part of the work. A bungle now would assuredly prove fatal, but there was no hitch. Few words were spoken. A boat-

swain's chair came down the side, a sailor grasped the rope, and the soldier sprang to his feet, swung into position, clutching desperately at the line as he was drawn upwards.

A cheer burst from the boat's crew as their passenger went aloft, and it was taken up by those on the destroyer and the *Shelford*.

From above the crowd watched the stranger's journey up the ship's side. Very soon he was alongside them, and tumbling over the rail on to the ship's deck, he tried to stand to attention on the slippery boards.

It was the Captain himself that sprang forward and grasped the newcomer's hand, and gazed with hearty admiration at the lithe figure, which with the collar of the great coat well up around the face, stood before him. The soldier's eyes roamed over the swaying sea of faces, as if searching for someone. A gasping cry, a dive through the wondering crowd. The cap fell off, releasing a mass of dark brown hair, the sight of which caused the onlookers to cry out in astonishment. A girlish cry of "*Jack!*" Then a burly form sprang forward and clasped the stranger eagerly, and he too cried aloud and hoarsely "*By God; it's Sheila!*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DOOMED SHIP.

THE sensation of the moment diverted the attention of the *Shelford's* passengers from the roughness of the sea. They crowded eagerly around the girl-soldier who had so strangely arrived in their midst, and been restored to her lover. Cheer upon cheer greeted those two figures, both clad in the King's uniform, as they embraced, but one there was who was not filled with joy at the sight.

Carl Presch, assured that the call of the warship was not for him, had crept on deck, and mingled with the throng of excited passengers and crew. When he saw that the young soldier, about whose advent so much fuss was being made, was none other than Sheila Goulder, his iron nerves, which lately had received many a rude shock, sustained a blow that was almost paralysing. Surely the age of miracles was not passed, when such a thing could happen as this delivering up of Sheila on the high seas. Fear began to creep into his stony heart now, fear that he was not after all to escape from the consequence of his many crimes. He staggered from the scene back to his cabin, there to lurk and think of some fresh means of removing his enemies. If he could in some way deal with Gordon then the game would turn again in his favor.

Few words were spoken at that re-union of the lovers. Jack was too bewildered to give expression

to his thoughts coherently; instead he confined himself to action, and regardless of the audience, hugged and kissed his newly-found sweetheart madly. Poor Sheila's embarrassment was great, and when Jack at last released her, a kindly stewardess led her away to provide her with clothing more suitable to her sex; leaving Jack to answer the questions and receive the congratulations of his fellow-passengers.

They watched the lifeboat make its perilous return voyage to the waiting destroyer, everyone breathing a sigh of heartfelt relief when the undertaking was seen to have been accomplished without accident. Then they cheered as the *Castlereagh*, with black smoke pouring from her funnels, resumed her journey.

Once Sheila was safe on board, the *Shelford* did not linger. Breasting the waves once more, she resumed her journey southward, the still excited passengers going below to discuss in groups the stirring incidents of the afternoon.

In a cosy corner Jack impatiently awaited the coming of Sheila. It seemed a long time, but she came at last, dressed bewitchingly in garments provided by some of the lady passengers, and which suited her admirably.

"That's better," exclaimed Jack, as he regarded her. "You made a bonny soldier, but this——" He looked the rest.

"I was glad to get out of them," confessed Sheila, as she seated herself beside Jack. "I'd be proud to wear the khaki, of course, but those things belonged to a detestable German traitor, Dr. Schell."

Then as the ship forged her unsteady way ahead, they, or rather Sheila, talked, and she had much to tell, for in the short space of time since they had parted, many strange things had happened. She told of the letter that had lured her to the Knatchbull Street hovel; of her escape therefrom, and dash to save the troopship; her trip to sea, and transhipment to the *Castlereagh*.

"I thought they meant to take me back to Sydney," she said. "But the destroyer was not going there, and the Captain of the *Leura* having put them wise to who I was, and that you were on the *Shelford*, they decided to get in touch with your ship and deliver me up to you."

"Then it was no surprise to you to see me on board?" exclaimed Gordon.

"Of course not; I knew that you had to go, even if I was lost, for a soldier's duty must come first," she declared.

"I am glad that I did, for it has turned out well for us so far," mused Jack.

"Yes, but I'll have to leave you again at Melbourne," she complained.

"But as my wife," said Jack, softly. "We'll be married——" He paused as an idea crossed his mind. "To-day is our appointed wedding day, Sheila," he cried. "Why postpone it further; isn't it unlucky to——"

"What do you mean?" she interrupted. "I do not——"

"There's a clergyman aboard," exclaimed Jack, putting an arm around her. "An army Chaplain,

a fine fellow too; I'm sure he'd be delighted."

Of course, the bride-to-be demurred; but so it was arranged.

The saloon of the storm-tossed *Shelford*, as darkness began to gather o'er the sea now lashed to greater fury, was transformed into a church, and there a bridal group assembled. Two loving, faithful hearts, that fate had rudely torn asunder to unite again in so romantic a manner, were made as one, and the thunder of the waves and wind was their wedding march.

Their story was known to all now, and the hearts of those on board that ship, save one, went out to the squatter's daughter and her soldier-lover. Though the wedding was an unconventional one, and there was no sun to shine on the bride, yet if the wishes of those assembled there—with that one exception—were consummated, she would indeed be happy.

And was the evil influence of that odd one to transform all thoughts of happiness and joy to gloom and despair? That was a question, which, of course, occurred to no one, but although unknown to Carl himself in this instance, the far-reaching effects of his Hunnish villainy was destined to bring disaster even out here on the raging seas.

There had been no lull in the storm, indeed it had increased in violence. So much so, that alarm was manifesting itself among the more nervous of the passengers. Talkative ones became silent; many could not face the evening meal, retiring to their

cabins, victims to the everlasting motion of the waves.

To those who remained, seated together in the saloon, a strange thrill of dread suddenly manifested itself. Faces blanched, and in whispers they told each other that something dreadful had happened, and that the ship was in grave peril. Jack, with the rest, was gripped with a sudden fear. He had felt a heavy jar, more severe than the pounding of the waves that had been going on for hours, and the engines had stopped.

He tried to assuage the increasing fear of those around him, but his words did not ring true; for they could see that he was concerned as much as they.

"I will go on deck for a minute, dear," he whispered to Sheila. "I must find out if anything *has* gone wrong."

As he stepped out on to the storm-swept deck, an officer, holding on to a stanchion, accosted him. "The old man wants all passengers to remain below, Mr. Gordon," he shouted. "We're not doing too good, making bad weather of it, you know."

"Nothing but the weather?" questioned Jack. "What's wrong with the engines?"

The man hesitated for a moment before replying. "You can keep your mouth shut of course," he said, "and I suppose the old man would tell *you*; there is something else. The ship's on fire."

"On fire! God, you can't mean that."

"It's a fact, it's the cargo in the after-hold; that's where it seemed to start, they say. There was an

explosion. The crew's hard at work, trying to keep it down. If this weather was not so damnably——ssh——”

He paused, for Sheila had joined her husband, and the man, with a warning gesture, moved away.

“What is it, dear?” asked Jack, surprised at her white face. “It's not like you to be afraid; you're trembling, girlie, you must have a rest——”

“Jack!” she gasped. “That man, our enemy, Carl Presch, is here on board this ship.”

“Presch!” exclaimed Gordon, in surprise. “Are you sure, dear?”

“Yes, Jack; just now after you had left, a man put his head into the saloon and glared around. His eye caught mine, and I knew him in a minute; it was Presch. He saw that I recognised him, and he drew back and closed the door.” Jack patted her soothingly. “Hang Presch,” he said, carelessly, though his heart was filled with misgivings. “What does it matter, little girlie, we have proved more than a match for him before, why fear him now. Once in Melbourne, it will be good-bye to the Count.”

He led her back and handed her over to the ladies who had taken her under their charge, and bade them all retire; he would rouse them if all was not well. They took his advice, and procuring his great-coat, he went on deck again. Others had made their way there now, despite the Captain's orders, and alarm was spreading. He spoke again to the officer who had told him of the fire.

“The engines,” he said. “You did not tell me.”

“That's the worst of it all,” said the man. “I'm

afraid we're done for; something broke down there, all the engineers and their men hard at it, but it's going to beat them. The fire's gaining; it'll be hand round life-belts directly and take to the boats."

"No boats would live in that," said Jack, gazing out into the night, and the other shrugged his shoulders in agreement. The waves were running mountains high, breaking right over the drifting ship and saturating everything not sheltered. A smell of smoke was in the air, and Jack realised that soon a panic must occur, for the danger could not be kept from the passengers. A few men had gathered around Jack and his companion, and another, a big figure in a great coat, lingered close at hand.

"What cargo does she carry?" asked Jack.

"A full ship of wool," was the reply.

That lurking man started quickly at the words. "Wool!" he snarled, "wool, Yedden wool——"

In an instant Jack had sprung and seized the fellow. "What have you to say about Yedden wool," he demanded, looking into the bearded face of Carl Presch. The man laughed wildly, as if madness was claiming him, and sought to shake himself free. "Let go," he cried, and though Jack held on with all his strength, the German wrenched himself free, and dashed away into the darkness.

"That man is a German spy," cried Jack. "It was he that blew up the Yibbi Bridge, and caused the bomb to be placed aboard the *Leura*. He is dangerous, he must be caught and kept a prisoner——"

"It is not worth while now, Mr. Gordon," said a quiet voice. "Though his friends might be responsible for what is happening below to-night. We are in the hands of God. Our ship is doomed, and I doubt if any of us will see our homes again. I have ordered the lifebelts to be served out. The boats will be ready, though God help us, they are of little use; I want you and others of the passengers to help us in maintaining discipline, and averting anything like a panic. I am going to try and hang on till daylight. Our engines are helpless, our ship is on fire. In the storm that is raging we have but little hope."

Captain Walsh passed on, calmly superintending the giving out of the lifebelts, and soothing the terror-stricken passengers, who were now rushing on deck. Gordon took possession of Sheila and told her all. But she was not afraid now that the worst had come, nor was he, for they could not be parted again.

In the inky darkness, clutching anything they could for support, those doomed souls gathered on the deck of the *Shelford*, waited, as they thought, for death. A wonderful calmness had come to all. The wind and sea alone, together with the fire that raged below their feet, maintained their anger, but their victims did not flinch.

Of all that ship's company, passengers, or crew, but one man feared to face his Maker. Escaping from Gordon, Carl Presch had invaded the crew's domain. Madness seemed to have claimed him. He

raved of Yedden wool—of Fatherland and Kaiser, and they hunted and assailed him as they would a mad dog. Into the midst of the cowering passengers he dashed, and grovelled on the deck, and there they left him. 'Through the night he raved, and wool and Yedden was the burden of his cry.

"The ship's on fire," he laughed. "That's Heiden's work. Fritz Heiden's wonderful chemical. We placed it in the wool at Yedden. Ha, ha, where we placed the body of——" Sheila, crouching in Jack's arms, trembled as she listened, but she heard no more. Carl branched off on something else, and staggering to his feet rushed away as if pursued.

"What did he mean, Jack?" gasped Sheila, but Jack only clasped her tighter.

"Never mind him now," he whispered. "He is mad."

Drifting whither wind and current willed, the big ship swept on to her doom. The afterpart was now ablaze, despite the waves that dashed over her. Up towards the bows the people clung, wishing for daylight, and the wireless operator without ceasing sent out his message of despair into the murk. Despite their plight, Sheila dozed in her husband's arms, and the first grey streak of dawn proclaimed a new danger. The roar of distant breakers told that the coast was near, and all strained eyes to catch a glimpse of the land. Soon in the faint light the surf was seen beating on the rocks to which they were surely drifting. Death for all seemed now more certain than ever, but in

spite of that no panic occurred. With their gaze concentrated on those rocks a long ledge of which reached out into the sea, all waited for the moment when their ship would be dashed to pieces. They had not long to wait, for rising on the crest of a great breaker the *Shelford* was carried stem-on right on to the rocks. Her forepart raised high out of the sea, struck heavily, and some unfortunates slid downward into the sea. The angry waves breaking over the submerged stern helped in the work of destruction, and the gallant ship that had steamed out from the Heads in the teeth of the gale the previous afternoon, was smashed in twain—a hopeless wreck.

Those who were left now sought some means of escape. To lower boats there would be sheer madness. Captain Walsh called for volunteers to take a line ashore, and there were many willing to risk the hazardous journey. A burly fireman was selected; with a light line around his waist, he slid down the ship's side and gained the rocks. Warily he made his way through the breakers until reaching a channel of boiling surf that lay between the rocks and the mainland, he paused but only for a moment. Into that seething current he hurled his heavy body. The rope snapped and he was seen no more. A gasp of horror went up from the onlookers, but the first man's fate did not make the others flinch. Another at once essayed the journey but the breakers beat him quickly, and he was dragged aboard again. Then with a shriek, the now-forgotten madman appeared, and springing past

everyone hurled himself into the sea. All watched spellbound, expecting to see him drown or be dashed to pieces before their eyes. But Fate was unkind, and allowed him to live, and the anxious watchers saw him reach the shore. Then three men went down that ship's side, and one was Jack Gordon. Across that chain of rocks they clambered, now covered with spray, now washed from their feet, but they battled on, until the channel was reached. Jack with belt and line attached went into that, and he won through. One of his companions also forced his way to land, but the sea claimed the third and he was seen no more.

A short rest, and Jack signalled that they were ready to heave a heavier rope ashore. Attached to the line he had brought with him, Jack and his companion pulled ashore a stout Manilla hawser, and with difficulty made it fast to a boulder. And then the rescue started in real earnest. In a basket skillfully manipulated by Captain Walsh and his men, one by one, the women first, all those hapless people were brought to land, until not a soul was left upon the ship.

As they assembled on the bleak shore, the sun came out, and as they realised how good the great God had been, all sank to their knees in prayers of thanksgiving.

* * * *

Carl Presch, maddened by the trick that Fate had played him, by allowing him to sail on the very ship on which the wool he had helped Heiden to "doctor" had been placed, had dashed recklessly

from the doomed ship, to escape the flames, that his action had been responsible for.

Reaching the shore battered and bruised, he dragged himself behind a boulder and there watched the work of rescue. He saw the survivors kneeling to give thanks for their deliverance, and in his disordered state of mind, he jeered at them from his hiding place. He watched them gather around a fire that had been kindled, and then something else diverted his attention. Bales of wool, mostly charred and blackened, were coming ashore, and as he watched, something impelled him to go down to the rocks and see them dashed and battered thereon. He stood there a lone weird figure, shouting words of derision that the wind carried where there was no one to hear; then he seemed to be struck dumb, for directly in front of him, on a towering wave a bale of wool was riding. On it came, smoking still though saturated, and as he looked his maddened brain could see but one thing—the dreaded figures 78. He shrieked aloud in his terror as the bale struck the rocks below and burst. One awful cry escaped him, and he plunged into the boiling current.

Jack Gordon heard that cry and saw the leap. He hurried to the spot, but nothing remained but some scattered remnants of the contents of the bale of wool, tossing on the swirling waters. Jack turned away, with a sigh of relief; it had not been his nature to feel glad at the death of a fellow-creature. But Carl Presch was different.

CHAPTER XXV.

DYSON DAY HAS SOME LUCK.

AMONG the many who had gone to the wharf to see the *Shelford* sail was Dyson Day. He, of course, was there to see the last of Lieutenant Jack Gordon, whom he had grown to like immensely. He watched the ship draw out and pass from sight; then he stood trying to think what to do next. He had not found the slayer of Private Hean yet. He did not know where to look for Sheila Goulder, and he was properly perplexed.

As he paused with his considering cap on, he felt a light touch on his shoulder, and turned to face a woman. A stranger from the country by her appearance.

"Yes," he said in a gruff official voice.

"I saw you part with Mr. Jack Gordon," she said. "He is—er—a friend of mine."

"Indeed," smiled Day. "I'm pleased to meet you."

"He was to be married to-day. I was at the church but no one came. How was that?"

"Bride *non est*," said Day briefly. "Wish I knew where to pick her up. What interest have you in the matter?"

"My husband was a German; he was killed at

Yibbi, when Jack Gordon and Miss Goulder saved the train. The men that did that job are responsible for Miss Sheila's disappearance."

"No doubt, but where am I to find them?"

She drew closer and whispered softly, "One is here in the crowd."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Day. "I must be a mug." He did not look round. "Will you point out the one you say is here, please," he said; "we'll nab the other later."

Tess Hoffman looked cautiously around. "I don't want him to see me," she said; "there he is, that man just going out of the gate with the soft hat pulled down in front, that's Fritz Heiden."

"Thanks," said Day. "Here, take this card, that's where you'll find me at any time."

Cautiously he watched Fritz walking towards the city, following at a safe distance. After a good walk the German hailed a taxi, and Day doing the same followed. He saw him alight at the flats in Darlinghurst, bidding the taxi wait while he went inside. Day dismissed his vehicle and approached the driver of the waiting taxi: "What-o, Steve!" he said; "where to with your German fare?"

Steve whistled. "A square-head, is he?" he muttered. "I've got to wait till he gets a cobber here." And then he mentioned the address to which his fare was going.

"Good," said Day. "Not a word, Steve. I'll be along pretty soon after you." He hurried to a telephone bureau and had a brief conversation with

headquarters, then he sauntered to that part of the city where the street named by the taxi driver was situated. He saw Steve's turnout go by and drop its passengers along the narrow thoroughfare, then as he saw two men in plain clothes coming towards him, he walked towards No. 33.

"Round the back and over the fence, you two," he growled as the two men overhauled him, and when he judged that they had scaled the fence, he opened the gate and tapped at the door. He repeated that knock, but there was no response. He placed an ear to the door for a moment, then he stepped to the window. One sharp blow smashed that, and to thrust back the catch, throw it open and enter was the work of a few seconds. Sounds from within made him hurry, but his assistants had forestalled him. Cowering from their levelled revolvers two men and a woman stood, and on the floor near by a huddled mass reclined, a poor old dead woman, whose discoloured features told of a violent end.

"Put the bracelets on, Tommy," said Day to one of the men. "Now, Fritz Heiden, out with your hands. It's no use your talking, we want you badly. That's right," the handcuffs snapped on Heiden's wrists, and he glared silently at his captors.

"Now, Dr. Schell, *alias* Captain Shelley, *alias* Private Hean, you're next. For the murder of the real Heine you know, and have we to add this to the list?" Day indicated Tessa lying so still at their feet.

Schell shook his head. "We know nothing of this," he said.

"Umph; that's why you're here I suppose. Well, what about you?" He turned to Mrs. Schmidt.

"I haf done nodings," she said. "Von girl vos here; she kill mine friendt, Tessa, und run away."

"The girl killed her," said Day sternly. "You lie, no woman's hands put that grip on her. You come along, too, old girl."

Then Mrs. Schmidt wailed and moaned and implored, but Dyson Day heeded her not.

"You'll have to come," he said. "And tell me who was here with that girl?"

"Cound Presch he her bring," answered the woman sullenly.

"That's more like his grip," commented Day. "Where is Presch?"

No one answered, but an idea flashed across Day's mind. Turning to Heiden he snapped: "You saw him off to-day in the *Shelford*, isn't that right?"

"If you already know, why ask me," said Fritz.

"That will do me," chuckled Day, "we'll get him from Melbourne, come on, we'll have to be moving boys. Madam, allow me to escort you."

AU REVOIR.

Once again the ribbons are stretched to a departing ship in Sydney Harbour. This time it is a troopship laden with young Australians bidding good-bye to their native shores, eager to take their places in the firing line, there to fight the enemy of their country.

Jack Gordon is aboard. He is no longer Lieutenant Gordon, he holds a higher rank, and he belongs to the A.I.F.

In the months that have elapsed since the eventful journey of the ill-fated *Shelford*, he has been transferred, with the consent of the home authorities to the Australian Army, and his promotion has been rapid.

On the wharf his pretty wife holds one end of a streamer, while Jack on the ship grasps the other. Though parting once again, both are happy. Their enemies have been vanquished, and so far their married life has been sunshine, and though the war still goes on as fiercely as ever, Major Jack has no fear as to the ultimate result. He is satisfied that the good old flag will wave triumphant in the end, and as the band plays "Auld Lang Syne," and the ribbon breaks, he shouts his farewell to Sheila, knowing in his heart that he will come back, and true happiness will be theirs at the old home at Yedden.

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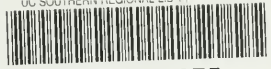
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